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Photo by Sgt. 1st Class Serrina Martinez

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Dear fellow Minnesotans,

Your Minnesota National Guard is **Always Ready, Always There**. We are an organization of nearly 13,000 citizen-Soldiers and Airmen, each committed to defending the Constitutions of the United States and the State of Minnesota against all enemies, foreign and domestic. This year's annual report highlights the heart of our organization: our **people** and their reasons for serving. Each Guard member has a unique story, and this report offers a glimpse into the dedication, resilience, and diversity of purpose that strengthen our ranks and drive our mission forward.

Our people are our greatest resource. Without their courage, commitment, and resilience, we could not achieve our mission or meet the demands of today's complex challenges. They serve alongside families who are equally dedicated, sacrificing daily to support their loved ones' service. This year, on Military Appreciation Day at the Minnesota State Fair and during the Minnesota Twins' Armed Forces Appreciation Day, we proudly recognized the critical role of our military spouses. Their sacrifices and support are essential to the Minnesota National Guard's readiness and focus.

In addition to investing in our people, your Minnesota National Guard is committed to **modernization**. We are 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. Last year, Minnesota was one of only eight states selected to receive the C-130J Super Hercules model aircraft. This modernization will secure the 133rd Airlift Wing's flying mission well into the future.

Our **partnerships**, both longstanding and newly established, extend across Minnesota, the nation, and the world. We continue to build on our alliances with Croatia and Norway through the Department of Defense's State Partnership Program, while maintaining regular training exercises with our neighbors in the Canadian Armed Forces. These collaborations are integral to our success, and as an African proverb tells us, "If you want to go fast, go alone; if you want to go far, go together." We are fortunate to have incredible teammates that will allow us to go far together.

Thank you for your continued support of our Minnesota National Guard. Your trust and encouragement enable us to better serve and protect our communities, state, and nation.

With my gratitude,

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

Our nearly 13,000 citizen-Soldiers and Airmen live here, work here, and serve here for many reasons. Learn more in the pages ahead.

# Serve Here

Develop skills for life.  
Find your passion, then train to master it.

Learn more:



## LIVE HERE. WORK HERE. SERVE HERE.

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.

**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.

**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.

**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.



4 Photo by: Army Spc. Tyler Becker



Photo by: Audra Flanagan

"I would encourage anyone to join the Minnesota National Guard. It is a family where people are there for you. The National Guard is the best way to go." – Army Spc. Franks Ondara

# People



“I joined to experience something I felt would challenge me and my commitment to leaving the earth a better place. I am serving a purpose above myself. And last, to show my children I take pride in challenging myself daily and leading with purpose.”  
- Tech. Sgt. Sean Mayberry

Photo by: Army Staff Sgt. Bob Brown

# Why We Serve



Army 1st Lt.  
Colton Rossow

“Finding the Reserve Officers Training Corps at the University of Minnesota, Twin Cities, allowed me to join the Minnesota National Guard as an officer and become the first person in my family to join the military. This allowed me to serve my community and connect with them on a level I never had before.”

“I didn’t have a strict plan for after high school and coming up on my junior year, I realized I needed one, especially if I wanted to pay for college in the future. The National Guard offered that. It also provided an opportunity to explore the medical field, a chance I wouldn’t have had for free in the civilian world.”

Army Spc.  
Kacie Diaz



Senior Airman  
Bridget Johnson

“I found a new support system unlike anything I’ve experienced before. When I first enlisted, I just wanted to finish school. Now that I’ve experienced so many opportunities, and with more on the horizon, I can’t imagine not staying.”

“Overall, thanks to the National Guard, receiving an education empowers one to excel, enriches their roles in society, and helps them to contribute more effectively in their military and civilian life.”

Army 1st Lt.  
Kent Mafuta



Army 1st Lt.  
Sabel Peterson

“The Minnesota National Guard can be a great resource for those looking to push themselves and see what they can do, all while earning great benefits that will assist many different facets of your life. There’s a spot for everybody in the Minnesota National Guard and many career options – we don’t just shoot guns and throw grenades!”

“I get to help not only my community, but the state as a whole. I’m very grateful for the opportunities to serve, especially during the [Certified Nursing Assistant] COVID-19 orders. I’m proud to have helped individuals during such a challenging time for Minnesota.”

Army Spc.  
Laisha Sanchez-Romero

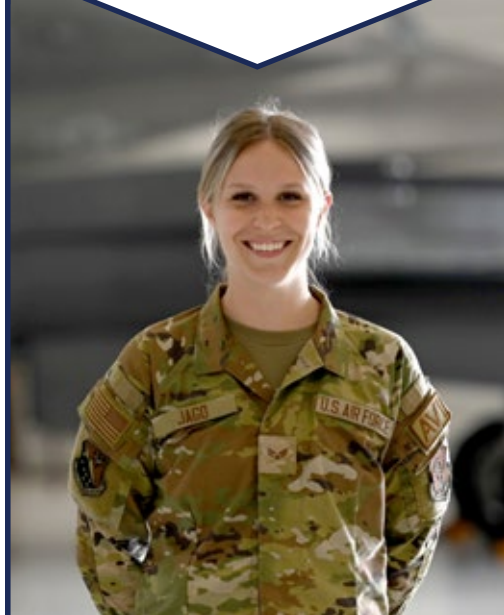


Sgt. 1st Class  
Chad Escher

“I love serving and have great passion for what I do. The military gave me direction, purpose, experience, and career management in the areas of logistics, operations, and supply chain management, which I really enjoy doing.”

“It just sets you up young in life, you become wiser and more independent by being here.”

Senior Airman  
Billie Jago





## Twenty years of service and a family united

By Army Staff Sgt. Mahsi Alkamoonneh

For Army Staff Sgt. Robert Clement, a tanker with the Minnesota National Guard's 34th Infantry Division, reaching his 20-year military service milestone is not the only major accomplishment this year. While deployed, Clement and his family celebrated something life-changing — the adoption of his stepson.

"It truly unites our family," said Clement, who has been a part of his stepson's life since he was two years old. "To give him my name legally, and the benefits that come with it, it's going to be life-changing for him."

The adoption process, though challenging, was made smoother with the Army's support. Clement's security background check was waived due to his military clearance, and he could video call into the court proceedings while deployed.

"The Army gave me 12 weeks of parental leave and reimbursed us \$2,000 towards adoption fees," Clement shared.

Despite being halfway around the world, the experience brought his family closer together. Clement acknowledges that balancing military service with family responsibilities is not easy. Throughout his two decades of service, his family has had to adapt to his long deployments and frequent absences. His service has provided financial security and opportunities for the family to create special memories, including adventures they would not have had otherwise.

Now, as he prepares to return home from his latest deployment, Clement is excited about the opportunity to spend more time with his children and be fully present in their lives.

"I'm looking forward to taking the new habits and lifestyle I've developed here and blending them with the one my family has created back home," he said. "In the end, it will bring my family closer."

Clement's military career has been rich with highlights, including overseas training missions in Norway and Croatia, two state activations, a deployment to Iraq in 2011-2012, and he has been a part of fielding new tanks and various other missions for his units throughout the years.



Photos by: Army Staff Sgt. Jorden Newbanks

"I decided to join the military as a family tradition, but also to unleash a better version of myself. I wanted a challenge and a sense of belonging."  
– Army Sgt. Elizabeth Apfel



## Soldier becomes first Minnesota National Guard woman to graduate prestigious course, becoming "Jedi Knight"

By Sgt. 1st Class Serrina Martinez

On May 23, 2024, Army Maj. Tracy Mankowski became the Minnesota National Guard's first female service member to graduate from the U.S. Army's School of Advanced Military Studies, or SAMS, under their Advanced Military Studies Program, at Fort Leavenworth, Kansas. Mankowski was among only 14 women in her graduating class of 122 students, who represented the best from across the National Guard, Army, Air Force, federal government, and allied international militaries. Graduates received a Master of Arts in Military Operations and became informally known as "Jedi Knights."

Aside from an intense application process, Mankowski said the course was also a challenging time in her career. It took 11 months to complete in person at the schoolhouse at Fort Leavenworth. To overcome the challenge, she and her classmates worked together to ensure everyone made it through.

"My student seminar became very close as we pushed each other to continue improving our performance throughout the year," she said. "We studied together to make sure everyone was ready to meet the final testing requirements."

The curriculum included courses in theoretical foundations, multi-domain operations, design methodology, great-power perspectives, the future operational environment, reflections on operational warfare, and more. The purpose of the course is to develop students' critical and creative thinking skills as leaders.

"I am very thankful to have had the opportunity and support to attend SAMS," Mankowski said. "I look forward to applying my training to future positions. I also believe our organization has a lot of talented and dedicated individuals. I would encourage anyone willing to accept new challenges to put in the work and be more; the opportunities are out there. Step out of your comfort zone to see what you can accomplish!"

## Minnesota National Guard recognizes Airmen of the Year

In April, the Minnesota National Guard honored five exceptional Airmen during its annual Airman of the Year ceremony at the Veterans Service Building in Saint Paul. This event celebrates and honors the dedication, leadership, and service of these individuals over the past year.

The honorees represented Saint Paul's 133rd Airlift Wing and Duluth's 148th Fighter Wing. Each Airman was selected for outstanding performance, leadership, community involvement, and personal achievements.

"These Airmen have gone above and beyond, not just in their primary duties, but also in their leadership and community involvement," said Command Chief Master Sgt. Lisa Erikson, the Minnesota National Guard's Command Senior Enlisted Leader.

The Airmen of the Year at the state level are:

- Senior Airman Joshua Frandrup, 133rd Airlift Wing (airman category)
- Tech. Sgt. Richard Schiff, 148th Fighter Wing (noncommissioned officer category)
- Master Sgt. Alicia Lagarde, 148th Fighter Wing (senior noncommissioned officer category)
- Master Sgt. Natalie Dornan, 133rd Airlift Wing (first sergeant category)
- Capt. Phil Larson, 148th Fighter Wing (company grade officer category)

The ceremony provided an opportunity to recognize the achievements of these Airmen and acknowledge their future potential as leaders within the Minnesota National Guard. "They have led, trained, and supported their fellow Airmen and communities to the highest level," Erikson said.

The honorees will now advance to compete at the regional level, continuing to represent the Minnesota National Guard.



Photos by: Army Staff Sgt. Bob Brown



## Best Warrior Competition

By Army Staff Sgt. Bob Brown



In April, members of the Minnesota National Guard competed alongside NATO partners for the title of the 2024 Minnesota National Guard's Best Warrior at Camp Ripley. The four-day-long competition tests competitors on their Army knowledge and skills.

"The Minnesota National Guard's impact as an organization extends well beyond our state and now our service members have a chance to work, learn, and compete alongside our NATO partners from Canada, Croatia, and Norway," said Command Chief Master Sgt. Lisa Erikson, the Minnesota National Guard's Command Senior Enlisted Leader.

The event was the first time all four nations competed in Minnesota simultaneously. This year's participants included 18 service members from Minnesota and eight international contenders.

The competition included an appearance board, the Army Combat Fitness Test, weapons qualifications, medical evacuation tasks, an obstacle course, a live fire exercise, and written exams. All competitors participated in the "Valor Ruck," comprised of five stations, each dedicated to telling the heroic tale of a Medal of Honor recipient.

Two winners, a noncommissioned officer and a Soldier, moved on to the Region IV Best Warrior Competition hosted by the Iowa National Guard in May. This year's winners included:

- Soldier of the Year: Army Spc. Dan Belous, from Anoka, who serves as an infantry Soldier with A Company, 2nd Battalion of the 135th Infantry Regiment.
- NCO of the Year: Army Sgt. Joseph Newman, from Saint Paul, who serves as a network communications systems specialist with C Company, 334th Engineer Battalion.
- International Soldier of the Year: Norwegian Air Force Spc. Morten Fossen-Lund, from Brekstad, Norway, who serves as a light machine gun operator.
- International NCO of the Year: Croatian Army Sgt. Marijan Jelić, from Ivankovo, Croatia, who serves as a land forces reconnaissance noncommissioned officer.

"The Minnesota National Guard Best Warrior Competition highlights the greatest strength of our organization – its people," said Command Sgt. Maj. Jason Rost, the Minnesota National Guard's Army Senior Enlisted Advisor.

"I wanted to serve my country and community. Seeing how the state struggled during COVID-19 and through the civil unrest, I felt that it was my civic duty to help." – Army Spc. Logan Mae Paulsen



## Minnesota National Guard engagement & inclusion: Building a stronger force through diversity and partnerships

By Cristina Oxta

The mission of the Minnesota National Guard's Engagement and Inclusion Program is to create and sustain an inclusive organization dedicated to mission effectiveness, and valuing diversity to ensure every individual has the opportunity, guidance, and information to reach their maximum potential.

Readiness is a priority for the Minnesota National Guard. The key to this is to recruit and retain the best talent while promoting a culture that welcomes members from all communities. Growing and maintaining a diverse force ensures the Minnesota National Guard at every level of the organization reflects the communities it serves. Treating members with dignity and respect, and leveraging their diverse backgrounds, skills, and experiences enhance our capabilities.

This is achieved by:

- Valuing individuals
- Identifying, recruiting, and retaining the best talent
- Providing resources, education, and training on cultural competencies
- Developing diverse, mutually beneficial partnerships

"As Minnesota changes, so must the Minnesota National Guard," said Army Col. Eduardo Suárez, director of culture, resiliency, and community engagement. "We recognize that to achieve our federal and state missions, we must recruit and retain diverse talent from across the state as well as be present and engaged in the communities in which they live."

The program relies on the efforts of eight special emphasis councils, comprised of Army and Air Force service members, and civilian employees. These councils include:

- African American and Black Heritage
- Asian American and Pacific Islander
- Disability Employment Awareness
- Hispanic and Latinx Heritage
- Holocaust Remembrance
- Indigenous Heritage
- LGBTQ+
- Women's Leadership

These councils partner with community organizations, highlighting national observances, attending and supporting local events, representing the Minnesota National Guard, and hosting their own special events.



Photos by 2024  
Top: Cristina Oxta  
Middle: Senior Airman Tylin Rust  
Bottom: Army Staff Sgt. Kjarra Wymore



## Recruiting and Retention Battalion hosts mission day event

By Army Capt. Kristin Ohrt

The Minnesota National Guard Recruiting and Retention Battalion, in coordination with National Guard Bureau, hosted their first-ever "mission day" event at two local high schools. To increase recruiting capabilities, the event provided high school students the opportunity to get hands-on with different careers and skills that are offered within the National Guard, as well as skills that are marketable in the civilian sector.

Students engaged in numerous tasks using virtual reality headsets. They fought virtual fires as firefighters and performed life-saving measures on mannequins.

Other scenarios included the donning of HAZMAT suits and working as hazardous materials handlers to clean up mock chemicals. They also conducted nighttime search and rescue operations, finding and rescuing an injured person.

"It's important for people in our community to understand what the National Guard really does," Army Sgt. 1st Class Isaac Girling said. "We're here to help the people in our communities."

Mission Day is still in its initial phase of assessment, but the Minnesota National Guard saw the benefits of the event first-hand, educating potential recruits on the benefits of service.



Photos by: Army Maj. Jodine Eells

"I felt a calling to serve my community, to forge my independence, and to evolve into a leader, mentor, and confidant."  
- Army Staff Sgt. Jacob Enger





## Minnesota National Guard spouse shares glimpse into military life

By Cristina Oxta

There are almost 9,500 National Guard and Reserve spouses in Minnesota. This includes Elizabeth Bradshaw, spouse of Army Maj. Justin Bradshaw, 34th Infantry Division. The Bradshaws have three children: Piper, 9; Arlo, 3; and Estelle, who passed away as an infant six years ago.

Elizabeth said being a military spouse comes with many challenges.

“Since we are parents, the hardest part for me is solo parenting when he is gone. It is an incredible mental load to carry, and the day-to-day tasks fall to the spouse at home,” Elizabeth said. “It is also challenging to not have your person around to talk to about anything and everything. You have to get creative to find ways to connect, especially while they are away.”

Therefore, a strong support system is a necessity.

“Luckily, we have an incredible support system through family, friends, colleagues, and neighbors, but it is still tough,” said Elizabeth, who volunteers with the Minnesota National Guard Soldier & Family Readiness Specialists team. She and her family also appreciate all the organizations, like Beyond the Yellow Ribbon, that support service members and their families.

Elizabeth asks the community to be patient, flexible, and supportive of their service member employees, friends, and neighbors.

“Don’t put the burden on them by asking what you can do to help them,” Elizabeth said. “Sometimes we don’t know, and it changes day by day. Instead, ask if Wednesday or Thursday would be better to drop off a meal. Offer to take their dog on a walk on a Saturday morning or mow their lawn.”

For Elizabeth, the positives and points of pride outweigh the ups and downs of being a military spouse.

“I think the most positive thing about being a military spouse is the community that can come along with it,” she said. “It isn’t always automatic, and you sometimes have to seek it out, but I’ve met some wonderful people through my husband’s military service. I’m also proud of what our family has weathered together and the service we have provided to our country.”

## Life as a dual military family

By Cristina Oxta

Having a spouse serving in the military can be difficult for a family. But how about having two military spouses in a family? Air Force Master Sgt. Tyler Pearson and his spouse, Master Sgt. Marina Pearson, both serve at the 133rd Airlift Wing Aviation Maintenance Squadron. They recently welcomed their first child, Everly, who is 11 months old.

Their dual military family faces added challenges.

“Both of us are commonly tasked with duties requiring us to be away,” Tyler said. “Sometimes, both of us at the same time. That requires a great support system to lean on, such as family, to either watch the kid or plow the driveway. Sometimes, life just gets put on hold. The [temporary duties away from home], deployments, drills, and additional training replaces the time that could be spent together. The everyday taskings still get accomplished, but that fully relies on the spouse who is at home. There are added responsibilities and more reliance on friends and family to support the two of you.”

However, there are also positives to being a dual military family, including a unique personal connection.

“Being dual military, you understand more of what your spouse’s workday entails,” Tyler said. “Able to understand the stressors, responsibilities, and day-to-day experiences. Knowing the abbreviations and acronyms that are said so naturally is a huge help too.”

The Pearsons thank all military spouses for all they do.

“No words can express the appreciation of the burden that military spouses take on,” Marina said. “They are required to not only take care of what’s left back at home but also give support to their spouse who is accomplishing the mission.”

Marina and Tyler encourage those outside the military community to support military spouses.

“Military spouses take on the responsibility of two sometimes. That is not the only stressor though. A military spouse might have less communication when the member is away, or the unknown of their assignment brings worry,” Tyler said. “This makes awareness of resilience critical. Be supportive, assist where you can, and understand that the experiences of military spouses are diverse.”



“My mother was a member of the National Guard, and her father and six of my uncles were serving in the National Guard. I felt that it was a family tradition that would not end with me. I have over 10 cousins that are serving alongside me, a ton of Minnesota National Guard pride.”

– Army Staff Sgt. Tara Anderson-Colvin

# Modernization



“I knew at age 17 that I wanted to serve my country, take care of and support the people I served with, and have the opportunity to be a part of something that would continue to develop and broaden my life experiences within the community, state, and nation.”  
- Chief Master Sgt. Jill Haapala

## New Ulm community breaks ground for new Minnesota National Guard armory

By Sgt. 1st Class Serrina Martinez

The Minnesota National Guard and local community members broke ground April 10, on the site of a new training facility in New Ulm, with construction scheduled to begin immediately and projected to be completed in approximately 18 months.

“The significance of this armory goes beyond its physical structure,” said Minnesota’s Adjutant General, Army Maj. Gen. Shawn Manke. “It represents a commitment to modernization and innovation within the military. In today’s rapidly evolving world, it is essential that our armed forces have access to cutting-edge facilities and technology to effectively carry out their mission and protect our nation.”

The new \$20.7 million facility will be 40,600 square feet, an upgrade from the current 100-year-old, 11,000 square foot building. The new armory will feature an assembly hall, unit storage area, classrooms, a fitness center, learning center, and men’s and women’s locker rooms with showers. The building will meet the requirements to be considered a Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design, or LEED, Silver-registered facility.

It incorporates many of the federal and state sustainable infrastructure requirements to include renewable solar, heat recovery systems, and daylighting controls said Army Lt. Col. Michael Thompson, who serves as the deputy of the Minnesota National Guard’s Construction Facilities Management Office.

In addition to housing approximately 20 full-time staff and 240 traditional drilling Soldiers, the facility will continue to serve the community of New Ulm.

“The readiness center will have the capability to function as an emergency management center in the event of natural disasters in which multiple agencies can operate,” Thompson said.

The new armory is a part of the Minnesota National Guard’s Readiness Center Transformation Master Plan to build new environmentally and economically sustainable training centers and to consolidate units into these facilities. The plan was developed after researching 64 armories across the state: Variables included conditions, age, capacity for improvements, demographics, diversity, travel considerations for unit members, and future federal and state funding of projects.



Photo by: Sgt. 1st Class Serrina Martinez



Photos by: Army Staff Sgt. Mahsi Alkamooneh

## Red Bulls transform unit while deployed

By Army Maj. Tommy Miller

Minnesota’s 34th Infantry Division was selected to execute a Transformation in Contact, known as a TIC, while deployed as part of Operation Spartan Shield in the Middle East. TIC is the first phase in the Army’s Continuous Transformation Concept and is arguably the most significant organizational change the Army has undertaken since the end of the Cold War.

The 34th Infantry Division was modernized with top-of-the-line communications equipment, resulting in the unit being one of the most updated in the U.S. Army. The equipment the division received is part of an integrated tactical network, known as an ITN. This network adds to the division’s network and provides additional redundancy within its communications. This network works as a mesh to add radios and modifies equipment connections to improve communications. Much like a cell phone works on WiFi and changes its connection to a mobile network upon leaving the WiFi connection, these radios enable leaders to place various repeater-type equipment throughout the battlefield. While Soldiers talk on the radios, the network transmits their location enabling leadership to have a real-time view of the battlefield.

Conducting this training while deployed saved time and money. The division’s headquarters is typically static and together while commanding Operation Spartan Shield, but as part of their research, the headquarters experimented with dispersing throughout the Middle East. At one point, the division split into 14 command posts, conducting everyday operations. While dispersed, the unit completed an exercise of the division targeting process, ensuring the headquarters could maintain its effectiveness.

The 34th Infantry Division’s staff worked to modernize the command-and-control team while successfully executing the Operation Spartan Shield mission, exemplifying flexibility, teamwork, and why the Minnesota National Guard was selected for this initiative.

“I joined the National Guard to prove to myself I can, to become a part of a community, and to make my dad and community proud.”  
– Army Chief Warrant Officer 2 Kasey Adams



## Modernizing the Minnesota National Guard

By Tony Housey

Currently, the 1st Armored Brigade Combat Team of the 34th Infantry Division operates the M2A3 Bradley Fighting Vehicle in both infantry and cavalry configurations. Additionally, the Brigade acquired the M7 Bradley Fire Support Team Vehicle. The A3 Bradley variants all incorporate a major upgrade in target location and designation, as well as modern improvements to battlefield sustainability, mobility, and survivability.

In June, multiple units of the brigade, conducted driver training, maintenance, and vehicle operation familiarization for the new Joint Light Tactical Vehicle, or JLTV.

It was the first full-speed use of the vehicles as units began moving Soldiers to and from ranges while taking part in field exercises and training missions. Each battalion from the unit worked to have trained and licensed operators before the annual training season. This was done to move from home station over civilian-traveled roadways and for tactical training events on Camp Ripley's rugged terrain.

In late 2023, the Minnesota National Guard received over 300 new JLTVs, a vehicle meant to replace the aging High Mobility Multi-Purpose Wheeled Vehicle, known as the Humvee. The vehicles were inspected for service, and the maintainer teams and vehicle crews were briefed and trained on how to operate the new equipment.

Depending on mission or unit structure, there are two different types of JLTVs: a four or two-seat design. Both are meant to provide the occupants with significantly more protection against mines, small arms fire, and shrapnel.

The JLTV offers faster speeds over terrain and better fuel efficiency than the Humvee.

During training on Camp Ripley, the JLTVs operated in thick vegetation along tight, winding trails, and in thick mud. The new vehicle handled these conditions well, with quick maneuverability and survivability.

M1A2 SEPv3 Abrams tank is a more modern version of the U.S. Army's main battle tank. This new variant offers greater protection, survivability, and a more sophisticated weapons system than its predecessors.

The upgrades also included making the maintenance easier overall, and adding advanced optics and fire control system technologies into the platform.



Photos by:  
Left: Army Staff Sgt. Jorden Newbanks  
Right: Tony Housey

“I joined the National Guard because I was looking for something different to do and to get into a field of work that I loved.”  
– Army Spc. Hailey Laurent

# Partnerships



“When I found out about the National Guard and realized I could be in the military and still have a civilian career, it just felt right.”  
– Army Maj. Jodine Eells

## State Partnership Program: Croatia

A team of five Minnesota National Guard Soldiers took part in the Adriatic Regional Security Cyber Cooperation exercise in Postojna, Slovenia, from June 24 – July 25, 2024.

Approximately 50 National Guard Soldiers and Airmen from six states participated in the exercise with their armed forces partners from seven nations. The two-week cyber security training event included approximately 60 countries.

The overall exercise was led by the Colorado National Guard and their State Partnership Program partner-nation, Slovenia. The Iowa National Guard's 132nd Combat Training Squadron Detachment 2 took the technical lead for setting up the cyber range and the scenario development with Slovenia's new Cyber Range Department.

The Minnesota National Guard's Army Maj. Luke Voeller, the deputy team lead and planner for the Defensive Cyber Operations Element, or DCOE, based out of Joint Force Headquarters in Saint Paul, said that the team of five from Minnesota partnered with one of their State Partnership Program partner-nations, specifically eight Croatian Armed Forces service members.

"We worked in a simulated environment, and what that means is we had a team that emulated a threat actor," said Army Maj. Luke Voeller. "They placed malicious software on our network and the other team's response was to try to hunt and search for all of that malicious activity, consolidate all of the information, and figure out how the adversary got into the network, what they were doing while they were inside of our network, and report that information daily to our administration team."

"Our major goal is to ensure, if we did have to work together in an international event, that we could work together efficiently," he said.

As the exercise progressed, the task of identifying malicious threats in the network became increasingly difficult, Voeller said.

A strength that the cyber team from Minnesota had coming into this exercise, Voeller said, is civilian experience that several team members have in cyber security.

"It greatly helps our team to be more efficient and effective when we do these exercises because there's already so much experience the team is pulling from their civilian careers."



Photos by:  
Top left: Air Force Master Sgt. Megan Shaner  
Top right and bottom: Army Staff Sgt. Bob Brown



"I joined the Minnesota National Guard because I wanted to challenge myself and serve my country. I continue to serve because of the experiences and genuine camaraderie within our team." – Army Maj. Luke Voeller





Photo by: Senior Airman Addie Peterson



Photos by:  
 Top: Sgt. 1st Class Ben Houtkooper  
 Bottom: Army Staff Sgt. Jorden Newbanks

## State Partnership Program: Norway

In 2024, Minnesota's State Partnership Program with Norway experienced a dynamic year, featuring 23 events between the two partners. This collaboration builds on a 52-year history of cooperation through the Norwegian Reciprocal Troop Exchange, known as NOREX, and expanded to include Norway's Air Force, Army, cyber defense forces, and the Home Guard.

Norwegian Airmen brought their F-35 Lightning II fighter jets to Duluth, flying alongside Minnesota's 148th Fighter Wing and its F-16 Fighting Falcon aircraft. The Norwegian Army's Commanding General, Maj. Gen. Lars Lervik, visited Camp Ripley and the 34th Infantry Division's headquarters in Arden Hills. Norwegian cyber defense forces participated in a digital exercise alongside Minnesota's 177th Cyber Protection Team. The Home Guard of Norway reviewed the U.S. Infantry Advanced Leader Course, while the Norwegian Army sent Soldiers to assess training at Camp Ripley's Medical Simulation Training Center.

In Norway, Minnesota Soldiers from the 34th Infantry Division participated in the national defense exercise Nordic Response 24. Members of the Minnesota National Guard also participated in the cyber exercise Locked Shields 24. Additionally, Minnesota Airmen and Soldiers were involved in Norway's National Shooting Competition, and the 1st Armor Brigade Combat Team and 34th Infantry Division supported Norway's Brigade North during a command post exercise.

Norway's Ambassador to the U.S., Anniken Scharring Huitfeldt, visited Camp Ripley, where she toured facilities, met local leaders, and explored the Minnesota Military Museum, gaining insights into the historical ties between Norway and Minnesota.

In 2025, the partnership will concentrate on significant air events, including exercise Swift Response 25. This will involve Saint Paul's 133rd Airlift Wing and Duluth's 148th Fighter Wing conducting an Agile Combat Employment exercise. The aim is to enhance participation in more extensive unit-level exchanges within the context of exercises in the United States and Norway.

"I joined the National Guard for family legacy, pride, and support for our nation."  
 - Army Col. Joel Stamp

## U.S.-Norway Reciprocal Troop Exchange

By Sgt. 1st Class SIRRINA MARTINEZ

More than 100 Minnesota National Guard Airmen and Soldiers partnered with the Norwegian Home Guard, known as the Heimevernet, for two weeks of winter warfare training during the 51st U.S.-Norway Reciprocal Troop Exchange, Jan. 31- Feb. 14, 2024. More commonly known as NOREX, it remains the U.S. Department of Defense's longest-running troop exchange.

Minnesota Soldiers and Airmen worked in teams with Norwegian Home Guard trainers to prepare for a five-day field exercise that took place deep in the Norwegian mountains. Learning to use Norwegian equipment, they worked to develop winter warfare survival skills. Within the harsh climate of the Norwegian mountains, Minnesotans practiced their skills in skiing through the rugged terrain, setting up camp in multiple locations, avalanche rescue tactics, falling through the ice and cold-water survival training, and other survival skills that included building lean-tos and snow caves to sleep in at night. Despite the challenges created by severe weather, they were able to test their skills and complete the training successfully. After completing the challenging cold-weather exercise, the group was warmly welcomed back to the Norwegian installation by the Saint Paul-based Serving Our Troops, which provided a steak dinner for them. Their Norwegian hosts also sponsored a cultural meal, traditionally called the Viking Dinner.

After the field training exercise and reception dinners, Guard members were invited into the homes of Norwegian host families for a weekend of activities, offering an opportunity for the Minnesotans to experience and learn from Norwegian culture and history. The troops also visited the village of Stiklestad and the city of Trondheim, as well as other areas of historical significance. Simultaneously, members of the Norwegian Home Guard and their youth program participated in similar training at Camp Ripley and were hosted by Minnesota families who shared local cultural experiences with their guests.



"I loved the sense of community and the exciting opportunities. During college I got to volunteer for summer exercises. Plus, I got to go to Norway in 2003 as a specialist." – Army Lt. Col. Jessica Warzecha

Photos by: Sgt. 1st Class SIRRINA MARTINEZ





## Canadian 38th Brigade Group completes annual exercise Sure-Shot at Camp Ripley

By Tony Housey

Canada's 38th Brigade Group completed their annual infantry foundations training, Exercise Sure-Shot, at Camp Ripley near Little Falls, during the opening weeks of March 2024.

"We do it during our yearly training cycle that starts in September and ends in mid-May," said Canadian Army Lieutenant Colonel Jim Davis, the commanding officer for the Lake Superior Scottish Regiment out of Thunder Bay, Ontario. "We take this time in March to redo our foundation training after we've had time to complete training throughout the year together."

Each Soldier completes their individual battle tasks and standards throughout the first week at Camp Ripley, and then takes the second week to apply what they've re-learned as a group. This includes training with the Canada's primary weapon systems, like the C7 rifle and the C9 light machine gun, as well as chemical, biological, radiological, and nuclear defense training. They also complete medical evacuation drills, indoor shoot house training, and even rappelling training.

Organized primarily by the unit, the 38th Brigade has been training at Camp Ripley for Exercise Sure-Shot since 1977 because of its close proximity to the unit and the easy access to the installation's ranges and courses provided by the Minnesota National Guard. The brigade is the widest spread brigade in Canada, bringing in units spanning from Saskatchewan, Manitoba, to Ontario.

"Many of the Soldiers here come from different parts of the Brigade across a large geographical area of Canada, and this training is going to bring them together to accomplish a common task," said Chief Warrant Officer Jon O'Connor, the unit's regimental sergeant major.

"The thing that stands out to me is that we always find something new on this base to look at doing for the next year because the facility is so magnificent and large in comparison to what is close and sometimes available in Canada," said O'Connor. "Over the years of training here, Camp Ripley has consistently put itself out there to provide a good product to its customers."



Photos by: Army Staff Sgt. Jordan Newbanks

## Serving Our Troops

By Army Staff Sgt. Bob Brown

Serving Our Troops is a Saint Paul-based organization of community and business leaders who have been on a mission to support members of the Minnesota National Guard for nearly two decades. Their care comes in the form of steak dinners for service members and their families.

Whether at home or overseas, the goal of Serving Our Troops is to bring families together for a simple thing – dinner with the family. Businesses and organizations of all kinds join Serving Our Troops for their projects. From corporate organizations to restaurant owners, labor organizations to Veteran service organizations – volunteers from across the spectrum come together to cook and serve meals to service members and their families.

Since 2004, Serving Our Troops has served more than 110,000 steak dinners to Minnesota's military and their families. They have supported 16 events, including overseas projects in Kosovo, Iraq, Kuwait, and Djibouti. In the U.S., they have served troops and their families in Minnesota; Fort McCoy, Wisconsin; Fort Sill, Oklahoma; and Camp Shelby, Mississippi.

Not only has Serving Our Troops been there for deployment ceremonies and reunions, but they have also supported the cultural meals of the Norwegian Exchange.

In 2024, Serving Our Troops delivered over 11,000 steaks to Kuwait and Jordan to feed Soldiers with the 34th Infantry Division. Back home at the Roy Wilkins Auditorium in Saint Paul, hundreds of families gathered for a steak meal. At the same time, livestreams of the events switched from Minnesota to Kuwait to Jordan. Family members and their deployed loved ones spoke with one another at Skype stations in Minnesota and overseas.

"Since the very first project in Kosovo, our three goals have been the same; provide a great meal for our Soldiers and families," said Pat Harris, a founding member of Serving Our Troops. "It's a message from communities from across Minnesota that we're thinking about you every day, and we spread that message through this 12-ounce steak that we serve to our Soldiers."



"The reason I am here is because I want to serve my community directly. The reason I stay is because I continue to love and serve the state of Minnesota." – Airman 1st Class Michael Rivera

## New Beyond the Yellow Ribbon Companies & Organizations 2024 Welcome to the BTYR network!

- Children's Minnesota
- City of Minneapolis
- Medica
- Travelers
- Minnesota Department of Transportation
- Replenex
- Slalom
- U.S. Steel

Photos by:  
Top left and bottom right:  
Cristina Oxta  
Top right: Audra Flanagan  
Bottom left: Stefanie Hurt



## Beyond the Yellow Ribbon

By Cristina Oxta

Beyond the Yellow Ribbon establishes and sustains a community and corporate network to meet the needs of Minnesota's military Veterans and service members of all branches and their families. There are 53 community networks and 87 corporate partners.

### Community Networks

In 2024, community networks coordinated over 400 events, performed more than 12,000 volunteer hours, sent over 2,500 packages to deployed service members, and provided an estimated \$400,000 in assistance to Veterans, service members, and their families.

The Watonwan County BTYR helped a Veteran who was moving for a job. The Isanti County BTYR network participated in an elementary school event to honor Veterans. Farmington, Rosemount, Burnsville, Big Lake, and Lower St. Croix Valley BTYR networks honored high school students joining the military and awarded scholarships to children of Veterans. The Hibbing-Chisholm Area BTYR cleaned Veterans' headstones at a local cemetery. The Owatonna BTYR hosted 50 women Veterans and service members at a retreat. During the holidays, more than 500 bags of groceries were packed and delivered for families at armories and wings statewide.

### Corporate Networks

In 2024, corporate partners supported over 90 events, contributed more than 4,000 volunteer hours, sent over 750 packages, and provided approximately \$350,000 to assist those in the military community.

Donaldson Company, Inc. donated \$6,250 to the Bloomington Veterans Memorial and Thomson Reuters donated more than 300 turkeys to military families for Thanksgiving. The Minnesota Building & Construction Trades' Ribfest raised an estimated \$27,000 to fund its military community support efforts. U.S. Bank, along with Freedom Alliance, donated a vehicle to two Gold Star daughters. Tokyo Electron donated to a clothing drive and Fairview Health Services donated 200 books for the 133rd Airlift Wing's family day. Minnesota State Colleges and Universities participated in reintegration program events and 3M participated in the Team Red, White, & Blue Walk/Run. The Minnesota Twins, Vikings, and Wild hosted military appreciation events. Minnesota Department of Transportation trucks and snowplows escorted buses of 500 deploying Soldiers to the airport. Medtronic hosted 300 service members at the Women's Leadership Forum while Boston Scientific hosted BTYR's first community and corporate conference.



Photo by: Cristina Oxta

"There is nothing like the community we have. Strangers come together and get the job done without knowing one thing about each other and the only thing we for sure have in common is serving." – Sgt. 1st Class Kayla Freeman

## Month of the Military Child: Minnesota families celebrate at Purple Up day

By Cristina Oxta

More than 1,200 military youth and their families attended the annual Purple Up celebration at Mall of America on April 19, 2024.

The event, hosted by the Minnesota National Guard Child & Youth Program, was held in honor of the Month of the Military Child, which is observed each year in April across the United States. It recognizes the commitment, contributions, and sacrifices military youth make for the nation.

Josiah Moss, 13, son of Army Capt. Andrew Moss, of the 1347th Division Sustainment Support Battalion, has attended the Purple Up event six times.

“Month of the Military Child is a chance for kids with a military parent to be recognized. It’s not even the stuff that you guys do, like Purple Up, it’s just nice to be recognized,” Moss said. He added that the best part of being a military child is, “I can be proud of what my dad does.”

This year’s event included music, face painting, airbrush tattoos, caricature artists, character appearances, giveaways, treats, activities, rides at Nickelodeon Universe provided by Mall of America, and a Build-A-Bear experience provided by USAA and the Minnesota National Guard Association.

Purple is the official color of the military child. It is a combination of all the colors of the U.S. Armed Forces: Air Force, Navy, and Coast Guard blues; Army green; and Marine Corps red.

In addition to the Purple Up event, the Minnesota National Guard Child & Youth Program hosted art and photo contests. Families were also able to request a letter from Governor Tim Walz thanking military youth. There are more than 16,000 children in Minnesota who have at least one parent serving in the military.



Photos by: Cristina Oxta



Photo by: Sgt. 1st Class Ben Houtkooper

## Professional Sports

By Army Capt. Kristin Ohrt

Lights dim, the music roars, fans rise from their seats and cheer; the sporting arena is filled with anticipation as they wait for their team to take the field or ice. Professional sports are one of America’s greatest pastimes and since 2003 the Minnesota National Guard and five of the professional sports teams have developed enduring partnerships.

Our partnerships include the Minnesota Twins, Timberwolves, Wild, Vikings, and the Minnesota United Football Club. Each team has its own way of recognizing those who serve and their the families, whether it be an all-encompassing military appreciation game or recognizing individual service members during their events.

For 21 years, the Minnesota Twins have been one of the teams that fully embraces the partnership and have set the bar for professional sports teams when it comes to recognizing service members as well as helping to tell the stories of the Minnesota National Guard. Because of their commitment, the Minnesota Twins were the recipients of the National Guard Association of the United States’ Patrick Henry Award.

The Patrick Henry Award is designed to provide recognition for those who distinguish themselves through outstanding service to the armed forces. The Minnesota Twins were recognized for their Yellow Ribbon Company status, assisting with recruiting, Veteran flag raising program, ticket donations to military members, hosting 21 Armed Forces Appreciation Days and other opportunities that they have supported over the years.

They distinguished themselves by providing support to the Minnesota National Guard’s Soldiers and Airmen, their families, and the individual organizations that support them. Their partnership has helped advance the Minnesota National Guard’s positive public perception by giving the Guard and other service branches a venue to highlight the accomplishments of the armed forces.

In addition to the Minnesota Twins, the Minnesota professional sports teams have recognized hundreds of service members over the past year as Guardians of the Game, Heroes of the Pack, Eye of the Loons, Hometown Heroes, and many other special in-game elements that help to tell the Minnesota National Guard’s story.

“The best part of serving is the military community I belong to and our shared goals and interests.”  
– Army Chief Warrant Officer 5 Erik Homme



## Minnesota Military Radio

By Army 1st Lt. Colton Rossow

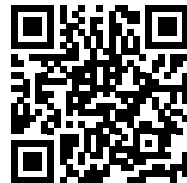
Since its founding in 2010, Minnesota Military Radio has been committed to sharing the stories of service members and Veterans throughout the state. We partner with organizations such as the Minnesota National Guard, the Minnesota Department of Veterans Affairs, Beyond the Yellow Ribbon, and the Minneapolis VA to highlight their work in supporting our military community. Our program serves as a platform to amplify these organizations' narratives, showcasing initiatives that assist Veterans and military personnel while fostering a sense of unity and camaraderie.

This year marked a significant transition for the program. After 14 years of hosting, Tom Lyons, whose vision and passion were instrumental in shaping the show, passed the baton to retired Army Command Sgt. Maj. Doug Wortham, former Senior Enlisted Advisor of the Minnesota National Guard. Lyons' commitment to sharing the voices of our military community laid the foundation for our success. Wortham brings a wealth of experience to the role, including strong leadership skills, deep military knowledge, and a genuine passion for advocacy. His understanding of the challenges faced by service members and Veterans has already begun to enhance the program's reach and impact. Under Doug's leadership, the radio program has expanded to 67 local stations across Minnesota and secured its first national broadcast through Wreaths Across America in 2024.

This year, Minnesota Military Radio celebrated a major milestone with 767 shows produced over 14 years of programming. A highlight of the year was commemorating the 80th anniversary of D-Day, where our team traveled to France to honor the stories of the brave Soldiers who fought valiantly. This year also saw us honor the 50th anniversary of Vietnam Veterans with a live show at Mall of America, providing a powerful platform for Veterans to share their experiences.

Building relationships within the military community is at the heart of our mission. We strive to foster connections that honor the past while supporting current service members and their families, ensuring their voices are valued.

Learn more:



Top photos by: Army Maj. Jodine Eells



"I want to give back to the younger generation and newly enlisted servicemembers to guide them and help their career progress and develop."

- Army Staff Sgt. Riley VonArx

## STARBASE

Exposure to leadership often starts young, as early experiences in teamwork, responsibility, and decision-making lay the foundation for future leaders to grow and thrive.

The Minnesota National Guard's partner, STARBASE, has inspired students' love for STEM (science, technology, engineering, and math) for more than three decades. Since its founding in 1993, STARBASE Minnesota has served more than 80,000 Twin Cities youth, with 13,783 additional students participating in the STARBASE Minnesota-Duluth program since 2017. Operating from the 133rd Airlift Wing in Saint Paul and the 148th Fighter Wing in Duluth, STARBASE is a Department of Defense initiative supported by the Minnesota National Guard, local school districts, corporate sponsors, and dedicated volunteers.

STARBASE offers a five-day, 25-hour STEM curriculum for fifth graders during the school year, aligning with state and federal education standards. During summer, the Duluth program expands its reach with STARBASE Explorers, engaging students in grades 4 to 6 and hosting youth from organizations such as North Woods Children's Services and the Fond du Lac

Ojibwe School. For middle schoolers, STARBASE Advanced extends STEM learning through industry and higher education partnerships.

"When students' curiosity is ignited at STARBASE, their excitement for STEM comes to life," said Charity Johnson, STARBASE Minnesota-Duluth director. "Our team of STEM-specialized educators delivers an advanced curriculum where students experience innovative technology, robotics, and integrated methods of learning. We consistently observe that our hands-on approach to STEM education helps students build confidence in their STEM skills that remain long after they complete the program."

With 90 STARBASE locations nationwide, including Puerto Rico and Guam, Minnesota's STARBASE program is an example of how community partnerships and innovative teaching can transform education and empower the next generation of STEM leaders. The success of STARBASE demonstrates how collaboration with the Minnesota National Guard, local school districts, corporate sponsors, and dedicated volunteers can play a role in the development of future leaders.





## Second annual Ribfest benefits Veterans and families

By Army Staff Sgt. Bob Brown

The second annual Beyond the Yellow Ribbon Ribfest took over the 34th Infantry Division's parking lot Aug. 21, 2024, in Arden Hills, for a day of delicious barbecue and fun events.

The event was hosted by the Beyond the Yellow Ribbon Committee of the Minnesota Building and Construction Trades Council, and featured 25 competitors associated with the trades, friends of labor, and partners.

Before Minnesota's Lt. Gov. Peggy Flanagan declared Ribfest open, the Building and Construction Trades Council conducted a career fair to highlight opportunities within the trades. The council has been an advocate for unionized construction workers for more than 70 years, representing more than 70,000 members. In 2022, the group became a Beyond the Yellow Ribbon organization, demonstrating its dedication to supporting military members, Veterans, and their families.

"In many ways, those of us in the military and those of you in organized labor have something in common," said Army Col. Eduardo Suárez. "We all reach a point in our careers and realize that the best decision we ever made was joining, whether it was the military or a trade union. You are setting a powerful example for other organizations in Minnesota, and your support means everything to our service members."

Besides the rib tasting and career fair, attendees were treated to a flyover performed by the T-6 Thunder Fliers and a raffle for everything from concert tickets to a week-long stay in Belize. WCCO-AM radio host Jason DeRusha emceed this year's installment.

Nearly 70 sponsors made the event possible. The support of those sponsors will enable the Minnesota Building Trades to help military service members, families, and Veterans throughout the year.

All proceeds raised at this year's Ribfest benefit the Building Strong Communities, a 501c3 non-profit organization, supporting programs and events for deployed service members' families and materials and supplies needed for free Veteran home repair projects completed by labor and trades organizations throughout Minnesota.

Photos by: Army Staff Sgt. Bob Brown



Photos by: Grant Hartman

## Minnesota Department of Veterans Affairs

Serving about 295,000 Veterans and their families, the purpose of the Minnesota Department of Veterans Affairs, known as MDVA, is two-fold. They ensure Minnesota Veterans receive the Federal VA benefits they have earned through claims facilitation and advocacy. They also address gaps in Veterans services through State of Minnesota programs and support.

The department supports Veterans from all eras, from World War II to the present day, who served in conflict and peacetime. As the needs of Veterans change, MDVA is responding with new or expanded services.

As the state's Veteran population is aging, 2024 saw the opening of three new state Veterans homes to meet the increasing demand for long-term care. Located in Bemidji, Montevideo, and Preston, these facilities will provide skilled nursing care to almost 200 residents. The three new homes join five others in Fergus Falls, Hastings, Luverne, Minneapolis, and Silver Bay.

To provide a final resting place for Veterans living in Southwestern Minnesota, MDVA opened a fourth state Veterans cemetery in Redwood Falls. Planning has begun for a fifth state Veterans cemetery to be located near Bemidji, serving Northwestern Minnesota. Other locations include Duluth, Little Falls, and Preston. The goal is to provide a Veterans' cemetery option within 75 miles of all Minnesotans.

The State of Minnesota is committed to ensuring every Veteran has a safe place to call home. During 2024, eight of 10 areas in the state had achieved "functionally zero" Veteran homelessness. This means that a community has measurably solved Veteran homelessness and when it does occur, it is rare, brief, and non-recurring. Minnesota is striving to become the fourth state in the country to end Veteran homelessness statewide.

Minnesota loses about 100 Veterans a year to suicide. MDVA strives to prevent Veteran suicide through a comprehensive approach. This includes engaging stakeholders in training and intervention, connecting Veterans, supporting organizations, educating the community, and promoting the Veteran Crisis Line. Veterans can call 988, then press 1 for help.

MDVA and its many community partners offer an array of programs and services. Veterans and their families are encouraged to learn what they've earned by calling 1-888-LinkVet, contacting their County Veterans Service Officer at macvso.org, or visiting the MDVA website at MinnesotaVeteran.org.

"My decision to extend my initial contract was because I felt I was part of the bigger picture in serving my country. My unit began to treat me and make me feel like it was a family." – Air Force 1st Lt. Becky Dimler



### 2024 Total Apprehensions

Cocaine	273.83 pounds
Fentanyl	103.16 pounds
	260,186 pills
Meth	1,009.95 pounds
Cash	\$3,276,838
Weapons	173 weapons
Arrests	509 arrests

Photos provided by Counterdrug  
 Top: 178 lbs of meth & 53 lbs of cocaine  
 Bottom: 33 apprehended firearms

## Counterdrug Program

By Army Staff Sgt. Bob Brown

The Minnesota National Guard Counterdrug Program is comprised of professional Soldiers from various military occupational specialties who have been screened and selected to support federal, state, and local law enforcement agencies across the state.

Their mission is to support drug interdiction operations and disrupt the trafficking of illicit drugs into the state by providing unique skills and critical capabilities to the law enforcement agency drug task force efforts.

Counterdrug analysts work behind the scenes and help drug task force agents and officers maximize enforcement efforts at the right place and right time to ensure they apprehend the right suspect safely.

With the information law enforcement provides through patrols and daily operations, Counterdrug members across the state assist by putting together the gathered information, which aids in identifying how to move forward with legal action to deter or prevent the sale or use of illegal narcotic drugs.



Photos by: Army Staff Sgt. Bob Brown

## 55th Civil Support Team and FBI conduct joint training at Prairie Island Indian Community

By Army Staff Sgt. Bob Brown

In March, the Minnesota National Guard's 55th Civil Support Team, or 55th CST, conducted a joint field training exercise, known as an FTX, at the Prairie Island Indian Community with several agencies, including the Minneapolis FBI.

The scenario began with community members falling ill after a large funeral gathering. Local first responders treating the attendees noticed symptoms consistent with anthrax exposure.

The Prairie Island Emergency Management Coordinator immediately notified the Minnesota Department of Health of their findings, setting in motion the activation of the 55th CST and Minneapolis FBI's Hazardous Evidence Response Team, known as HERT.

The 55th CST routinely partners with the FBI in almost every FTX it conducts. According to Army Lt. Col. Allan Hetteen, the 55th CST commander, this partnership is crucial to accomplishing their mission.

"Since part of our primary mission is to encounter and mitigate the hazards of chemical, biological, radiological, nuclear Weapons of Mass Destruction, anything that involves WMD also involves the FBI as the primary law enforcement agency," he said.

After setting up command centers on Prairie Island, the local agencies conducted an operations sync to update participants on the situation and lay out the mitigation plan. The agencies suspected the substance responsible for the outbreak might have originated inside the Prairie Island Community Center. Following the sync, two members of the 55th CST put on hazardous material suits and entered the building to investigate.

Upon emerging from the building, the team stopped at a decontamination tent before reporting their discovery. Fifty yards away, the FBI's HERT team received a brief as they prepared to inspect the center.

After the brief in the FBI's command center, two agents in HAZMAT suits followed the same route as their Minnesota National Guard counterparts, entering the utility room where the suspicious substance was found.

After the FBI marked the substance, the CST collected samples to determine whether or not it was anthrax and then worked with agencies to plan the next steps in the response.

"We wanted to establish a partnership with the Prairie Island tribe to let them know we are available to help them with any CBRN hazards," said Hetteen, who noted the FTX was the first conducted at the community involving the Minnesota National Guard.

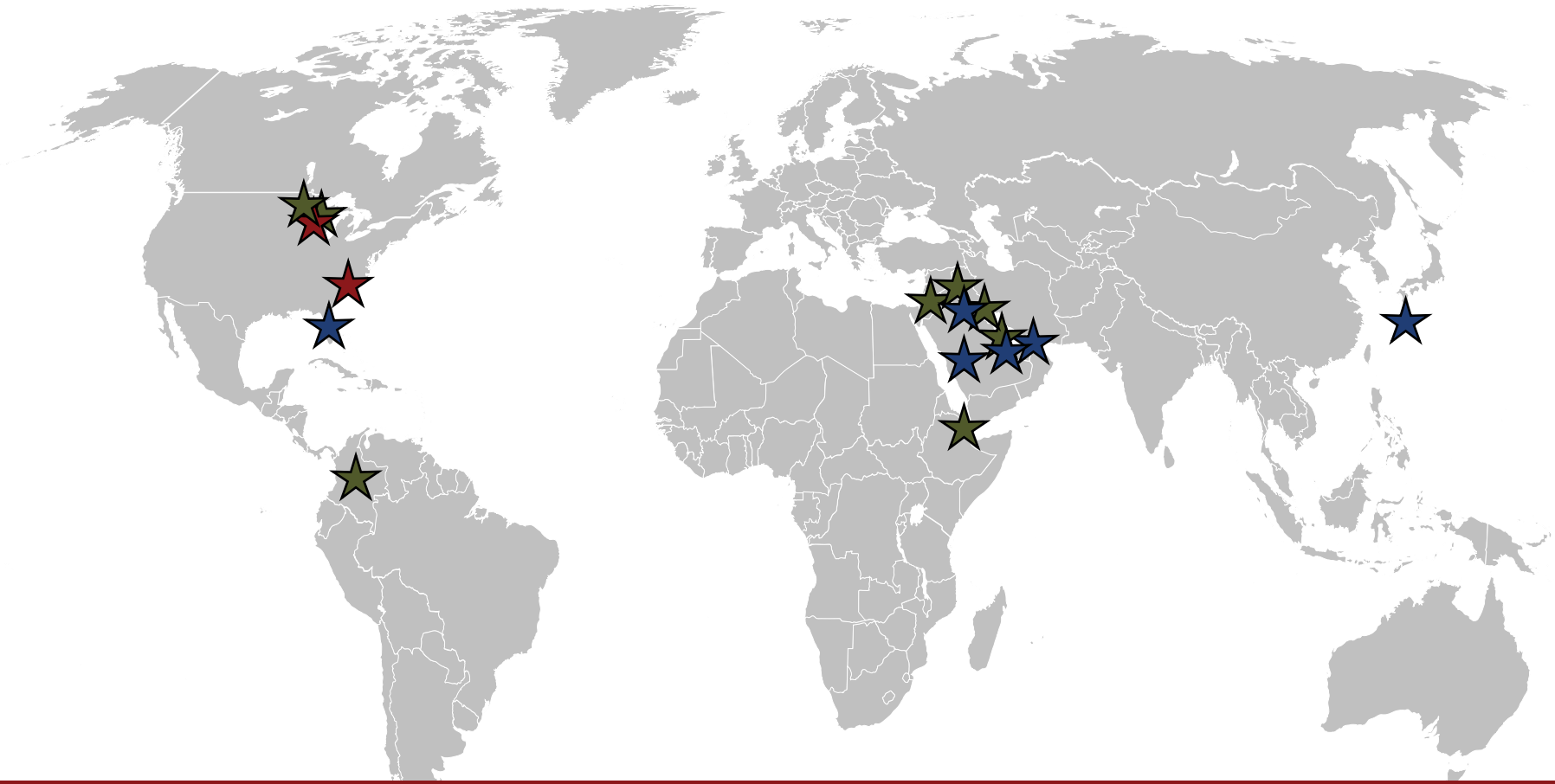
"I knew I wanted to do something that had a greater impact on the world and those around me."  
 - Army Staff Sgt. Katie Olsrud








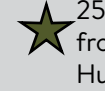


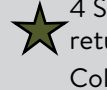


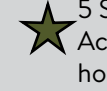









# Mobilizations



Photo by: Audra Flanagan

-  Army
-  Air
-  Joint



	February	March	April	May	June	July	August	September	October	December
State Activations				 4 Soldiers activated to assist in the Minn. Boundary Water Search and Rescue	 60 Soldiers activated to assist with flood response in Minn.	 129 Soldiers and Airmen activated to assist the RNC in Wis.			 24 Airmen and Soldiers activated to assist with Hurricane Helene efforts in NC	 13 Airmen activated for Hurricane Milton efforts in FL
Federal Deployments	 2 Airmen of the 133rd Air Wing deploy to Qatar	 536 Soldiers from the 34th Infantry Division deploy to Kuwait, Jordan and Qatar   25 Soldiers from the 147th Human Resources detachment 3 and 4 return home from Kuwait and Iraq	 1 Airman of the 133rd Air Wing deploys to United Arab Emirates   2 Airmen of the 133rd Air Wing return home from Qatar   4 Soldiers from 2-245 return home from Colombia	 24 Soldiers from the 247th Financial Management Services Detachment deploy to Iraq   2 Airmen of the 133rd Air Wing return home from Saudi Arabia   5 Soldiers of the 1903 Acquisition team return home from Djibouti	 2 Airmen of the 133rd deploy to Kuwait	 312 Airmen of the 148th Fighter Wing deploy to Japan	 55 Soldiers of the 204th Medical Company-Area Support deploy to Iraq	 5 Soldiers of the 1904 Acquisition team deploy to Kuwait   35 Airmen of the 133rd Air Wing deploy to Kuwait	 2 Airmen of the 133rd Air Wing return home from Qatar   312 Airmen of the 148th Fighter Wing returned home from Japan	 536 Soldiers from the 34th Infantry Division return from Kuwait, Jordan and Qatar   2 Airmen of the 133rd Air Wing return home from Kuwait

# Major Commands



“The best part of serving in the military is making friends with those who you might not have met if you didn’t join. It’s hard to explain that to people who aren’t in the military, but the camaraderie that is created with people from different walks of life is truly irreplaceable.”  
– Army Capt. Danielle Heitkamp



**Headquarters**  
Saint Paul, MN

**Commander**  
Maj. Gen. Shawn Manke

**Senior Enlisted Leader**  
Command Chief Master Sgt. Lisa Erikson

**Strength**  
HQ - 433  
Subordinate - 12,627



## Joint Force Headquarters

### Summary

Located in Saint Paul, the Minnesota National Guard's Joint Force Headquarters is a joint Army and Air unit tasked to oversee operations for all state National Guard forces. The unit coordinates military support at the request of the Governor in the event of a disaster or state emergency.

### 2024 Accomplishments

The unit staff continues to focus on modernization with the refurbishment of an 18-year-old radio communications platform, transferring over 100 new M2 Bradley Fighting Vehicles to our fleet, and continued operator training on the newly fielded Joint Light Tactical Vehicles.

The Joint Force Headquarters staff continued to foster and maintain our relationships with our State Partnership Program countries of Norway and Croatia along with other NATO partners. We participated in multiple exercises with both countries to include the cyber exercise Lock Shield in Norway, a cyber technical workshop in Croatia, and the Adriatic Regional Security Cyber Cooperation Exercise in Slovenia.

The joint staff also helped the six major subordinate command teams by providing the organizational inspection program findings and recommendations integrating command supply discipline program, command deployment discipline program, and food service inspection results.

### 2025 Objectives

The Joint Force Headquarters staff will continue to implement modernization efforts for the state by fielding the Next Generation Squad Weapon, over 50 new M1A2 SEPv3 Abrams main battle tanks, and over 130 Armored Multi-Purpose Vehicles.

The staff continues future planning by reviewing and updating our state response plans for natural disasters and civil disturbances.

The unit will continue to build upon our relationship with our inter-agency partners, such as the FBI and Minnesota's Bureau of Criminal Apprehension. The staff builds on these relationships every year through counterintelligence sharing and with our counterdrug program. The program provides trained professionals from the National Guard to work alongside local law enforcement to support the detection, interdiction, disruption, and curtailment of drug trafficking activities.

Photo by: Sgt. 1st Class  
Sirrina Martinez

"I continue to serve because I feel like I'm making a difference and creating value for the American people."  
- Army Lt. Col. Brian Morgan



Photo by: Army Staff Sgt. Sydney Mariette

**Headquarters**  
Arden Hills, MN

**Commander**  
Maj. Gen. Charles Kemper

**Senior Enlisted Leader**  
Command Sgt. Maj. Matthew Erickson

**Strength**  
HQ - 655  
Subordinate - 9,140



## 34th Infantry Division

### Summary

Known as the Red Bulls, the Arden Hills-based 34th Infantry Division provides training and readiness oversight for nine National Guard brigades with more than 27,000 Soldiers across Minnesota and 29 other states. In Minnesota, the 34th includes the 1st Armored Brigade Combat Team, the 34th Combat Aviation Brigade, the 34th Division Artillery, the 84th Troop Command, and the 347th Regional Support Group.

### 2024 Accomplishments

In early 2024, the division headquarters departed for Fort Cavazos, Texas to conduct training for mobilization to the Middle East. On March 24th, the Red Bulls assumed command of Operation Spartan Shield's Task Force Spartan from the California National Guard's 40th Infantry Division. They lead nearly 10,000 National Guard, Army Reserve, and active-duty Army Soldiers in maintaining response forces, strengthening partnerships, and executing contingency plans while conducting key leader engagements, exercises, symposia, and humanitarian aid and disaster relief planning. They conducted exercises throughout the deployment, maintaining a force to deter regional aggression and strengthening relationships with U.S. allied forces and host nations. They had a prominent role in Operation Neptune Solace, the humanitarian pier built off the coast of Gaza.

The Red Bulls dedicated 70 personnel to support Operation Inherent Resolve by advising, assisting, and enabling partner forces to independently maintain the enduring defeat of Da'esh in Iraq and designated areas of Syria, facilitating long-term security cooperation. On November 24th, they transferred command to the Indiana National Guard's 38th Infantry Division "Cyclones" and returned home in December.

Rear detachment Soldiers supported in and out-of-state units, providing control support for command post exercises and training events for several brigades, including the Norwegian Northern Brigade. They worked to create a digital fires standard operating procedures, conducted systems training and a signal exercise, and assisted in planning for the Joint Readiness Training Center rotation and a future brigade deployment.

### 2025 Objectives

The organization begins 2025 returning from its deployment to the Middle East. The headquarters will participate in the Yellow Ribbon Reintegration Program events. Next, they will prepare for annual training, the headquarters' first annual training to fully incorporate out-of-state aligned units. The 196th Maneuver Enhancement Brigade from the South Dakota National Guard and units from the 34th Combat Aviation Brigade will conduct training at Camp Ripley, while the 34th Infantry Division Headquarters provides mission command for a command post exercise. These events are the most extensive multi-echelon training exercises for the division in the operationally aligned division era.

Photo by: Army Staff Sgt. Jordan Newbanks



"I love being a part of the Guard and the units I have been a part of and working alongside the high-quality personnel in Minnesota. Wearing the American flag on my shoulder everyday means a lot to me and I want to serve my country to the best of my ability."  
- Army Lt. Col. Sarah Witt

Photo by: Army Staff Sgt. Mahsi Alkamooneh

# 34 DIVARTY

**Headquarters**  
Arden Hills, MN

**Commander**  
Col. Eric Wieland

**Senior Enlisted Leader**  
Command Sgt. Maj. Robert Harris

**Strength**  
148



## 34th Division Artillery

### Summary

The 34th Division Artillery, known as “DIVARTY,” is the first of eight such National Guard units. The unit increases capabilities at the division headquarters by providing long-range precision fires, command and control of division-level artillery assets, fire support, and synchronization of joint fires. The unit will continue to build organizational and operational capacity over the next few years, formally reporting in October 2025.

### 2024 Accomplishments

This year the 34th Division Artillery continued its implementation with the focus on gaining personnel and equipment while also supporting the 34th Division Headquarters as they mobilized in support of Operations Spartan Shield and Inherent Resolve in the Middle East. In February, the brigade deployed 38 Soldiers with the division headquarters and aligned its remaining Soldiers under the unit’s rear detachment. Deployed Soldiers served in critical roles within Task Force Spartan and Combined Joint Task Force – Operation Inherent Resolve, solving complex and emerging problems across the Middle East. The rear detachment continued its support of the division’s transition by focusing on improving its field artillery standardization, and developing its digital standard operation procedures which enables units to conduct digital training with the brigade in the future.

### 2025 Objectives

34th Division Artillery Soldiers returning from deployment will focus on reintegration with their employers and families before returning to train with their units during the summer. Soldiers who were not deployed will concentrate on honing their skills through individual training and Soldier readiness during drill and annual training. Standardization and certification remain a priority as the organization finalizes its stand-up and prepares to support artillery units across the division. In March, DIVARTY will hold an artillery leader development training event to discuss emerging trends, technology, and innovations that will support the division in large-scale combat operations.



Photos by: Army Staff Sgt. Jorden Newbanks

“At first, I joined the guard because I thought it was cool, then I found out about all the opportunities it gave me: the lifelong friendships, camaraderie, job opportunities. It has allowed me to grow stronger in relations with my family and my faith.” – Army Sgt. Dallas Ruis

**Headquarters**  
Inver Grove Heights, MN

**Commander**  
Col. Kyle Liudahl

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

**Strength**  
HQ - 153  
Subordinate - 892



## 34th Combat Aviation Brigade

### Summary

The 34th Combat Aviation Brigade is comprised of a Headquarters and Headquarters Company; the 2nd Battalion, 147th Aviation Regiment; and the 834th Aviation Support Battalion. Together, these units support the brigade's mission to provide aviation capabilities for both federal and state missions. In September, the brigade transitioned from the 34th Expeditionary Combat Aviation Brigade to the 34th Combat Aviation Brigade expanding its size and capabilities. This transition included the addition of two AH-64 Apache helicopter battalions, significantly enhancing the brigade's offensive, security, and reconnaissance capabilities in support of the 34th Infantry Division, state and national defense objectives.

### 2024 Accomplishments

The brigade flew over 5,080 flight hours across 877 missions and welcomed 229 new personnel into its ranks. Additionally, they activated 21 Soldiers to support the 34th Infantry Division's mobilization efforts. This reinforced the brigade's integral role in enabling the division's missions. The brigade participated with more than 100 Soldiers in an Exportable Combat Training Capability exercise that served as a platform for refining command and control operations. F Company, 1st Battalion of the 189th Aviation Regiment provided airspace management during the exercise, ensuring seamless real-time control. The 834th Aviation Support Battalion fuel section successfully refueled aircraft during the exercise. Several subordinate units within the brigade played critical roles, conducting air assault training, field maintenance, and downed aircraft recovery team exercises. Additionally, units issued 43,000 gallons of fuel, 81,380 rounds of ammunition, and 11,056 meals during annual training, managed over 4,200 air movements, conducted 36 precision radar approaches, and spent the year focused on the upgraded UH-60V Black Hawk helicopter fielding.

### 2025 Objectives

In 2025, the brigade will participate in a combined annual training exercise with the 34th Infantry Division and the 196th Maneuver Enhancement Brigade, focusing on water crossing and attack operations. The 834th Aviation Support Battalion will continue to assess and refine its training in support of the National Guard Reaction Force mission and during annual training they will train on sustainment skills at the Sustainment Training Center in Camp Dodge, Iowa. The 2nd Battalion, 147th Aviation Regiment will deploy to Fort McCoy focusing their training on sustaining and executing platoon level air assault operations. A Forward Support Medical Platoon from C Company, 2nd Battalion, 211th Aviation Regiment, will mobilize to the Joint Readiness Training Center in support of the 1st Battalion, 151st Aviation Regiment and 2nd Infantry Brigade Combat Team, 34th Infantry Division.



Photo by: Army Staff Sgt. Jordan Newbanks

“It has been the most rewarding part of my life and has brought me some of the best experiences I could ever imagine.”  
– Army Spc. Hannah Hill



Photo by: Army Capt. Kate Sulzle

# 1/34 ABCT

**Headquarters**  
Rosemount, MN

**Commander**  
Col. Michael Klaphake

**Senior Enlisted Leader**  
Command Sgt. Maj. Ben Schieber

**Strength**  
HQ - 123  
Subordinate - 4,542



## 1st Armored Brigade Combat Team

### Summary

The 1st Armored Brigade Combat Team of the 34th Infantry Division consists of a headquarters and seven battalions. Over 4,500 Soldiers comprise the brigade's combined arms, armor, cavalry, infantry, artillery, engineer, and brigade support battalions. The brigade constitutes almost half of the Minnesota National Guard's total force and provides subordinate commands with guidance to support state and federal missions.

### 2024 Accomplishments

In March, nearly 30 Soldiers of the brigade performed battlefield command operations as a response cell during Austere Challenge 24 at Fort Riley, Kansas, in support of the 1st Infantry Division's War Fighter 24-3.

In June, four platoons from the brigade, led by C Company, 1st Battalion, 194th Armor Regiment, supported the 2nd Brigade, 34th Infantry Division for an exercise at Camp Ripley with the 2nd Battalion, 135th Infantry Regiment. The regiment sent 10 Soldiers to the Sennelager Training Area in Germany and trained during the Rhino-Heart exercise with German and British Armed Forces. The 334th Brigade Engineer Battalion and 2nd Battalion, 135th Infantry Regiment, trained as a National Guard Reaction Force, to provide the state with rapid response capabilities. The 1st Battalion, 125th Field Artillery Regiment conducted an uncontested Wet Gap Crossing exercise with the Michigan National Guard at Camp Ripley. In September, the 334th Brigade Engineer Battalion trained on the Volcano Mine deployment system and provided a demonstration to the Joint Program Executive Office Armaments and Ammunitions, Northrup Gunman, and a Swedish Army delegation.

The 1st Armored Brigade Combat Team fielded more than 4,600 pieces of equipment, executed 23 new equipment fieldings, and conducted 20 training courses on the new equipment. The modernization effort transformed the brigade into one of the Army's most technologically advanced armor brigades.

### 2025 Objectives

In 2025, the brigade will continue modernization efforts, updating the Abrams tank, the new Armored Multi-Purpose Vehicle, and the next-generation squad weapons battle rifle and squad automatic rifle. The brigade will transfer responsibility for the National Guard's Reaction Force mission, complete the modernization effort, begin preparing for planned federal missions, and conduct a command post exercise at Camp Ripley.



Photos by: Army Staff Sgt. Jorden Newbanks

"I continue to serve in the Minnesota National Guard because it allows me to give back to my community while protecting the freedoms we all cherish. The vast experiences of our Soldiers both in their civilian and military craft give me great confidence that we stand ready to make a difference, both at home and abroad." – Army Maj. Michael Popp

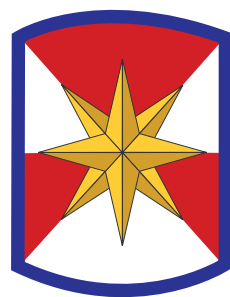
# 347 RSG

**Headquarters**  
Brooklyn Park, MN

**Commander**  
Col. Jesse Johnson

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

**Strength**  
HQ - 87  
Subordinate - 1,071



## 347th Regional Support Group

### Summary

The mission of Minnesota's 347th Regional Support Group is to deploy and provide life support and command and control of military base operations. The unit's responsibilities include leading the reception, staging, onward movement, and integration of supporting forces as they arrive, managing facilities, and providing administrative, medical, and logistical support for troop services on a base camp. The unit is the higher headquarters of the 1347th Division Sustainment Support Battalion and has eight subordinate, separate units with distinct mission sets. The brigade's companies also provide support during homeland defense and other civil support missions.

### 2024 Accomplishments

In 2024, the 347th Regional Support Group had many units return and deploy to various locations. Soldiers from Detachments 3 and 4 of the 147th Human Resources Company returned home from Operation Spartan Shield in Kuwait. The Detachments provided personnel support services and theater gateway operations support during a 24-month deployment cycle for the company. Soldiers from the 434th Support Maintenance Company returned home from their mobilization on the Southwest border. The 1903rd Acquisition Team returned to Minnesota after their mobilization supporting Operation Enduring Freedom in the Horn of Africa.

Throughout training year 2024, the 347th Regional Support Group continued to support federal mission sets through mobilizations of the 247th Finance Detachment in Iraq, 204th Medical Company Area Support in Iraq and Kuwait, and 1904th Acquisition Team in Kuwait.

### 2025 Objectives

In July of 2025, all units and personnel of the 347th Regional Support Group will be back in Minnesota, marking the first time in seven years that the whole unit has been together. The brigade will assume its Mobilization Force Generation Installation mission. After its activation in September of 2024, the 1347th Division Sustainment Support Battalion will continue increasing unit strength, training on core mission tasks, and building relationships with companies in the Iowa National Guard. All of the 347th Regional Support Group organizations continue to train and prepare to support state and federal missions.



"I serve for love of country and the state of Minnesota. I serve to shape the minds of young leaders and assist them in reaching their highest potential. I serve for the camaraderie and relationships made over the years. Most of all, I serve for the Soldier."

- Army Command Sgt. Maj. Jim Perez

Photos by: Sgt. 1st Class Bill Boecker

**Headquarters**  
Cambridge, MN

**Commander**  
Col. Matthew Jukkala

**Senior Enlisted Leader**  
Command Sgt. Maj. Katie Blackwell

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



## 84th Troop Command

### Summary

The 84th Troop Command, headquartered in Cambridge, controls field artillery, engineers, military police, and civil support forces, providing a force capable of performing a wide variety of missions. A specialized command with a unique mission, the unit maintains training standards to remain ready to support federal missions and conduct domestic operations throughout the state.

### 2024 Accomplishments

In 2024, the 84th Troop Command supported a wide range of federal and domestic missions. The 682nd Engineer Battalion, the 850th Horizontal Engineer Construction Company, and the 257th Military Police Company completed demobilization and reintegration after a 13-month mission on the Southwest border, assisting U.S. Customs and Border Protection. The 850th Engineer Construction Company supported the city of Waterville with civilian emergency equipment transportation during major flooding. The 851st Vertical Engineer Construction Company supported Iowa's 2nd Brigade Combat Team during training in July. The 1st Battalion, 151st Field Artillery Regiment supported the Minnesota side of the 51st U.S.-Norway Reciprocal Troop Exchange. The 34th Military Police Company continued as the National Guard Reaction Force for the Twin Cities area. The 55th Civil Support Team conducted 12 field training exercises, working with over 40 inter-agency partners on search and extraction, decontamination, medical, fatality search and recovery, communications, and command and control.

### 2025 Objectives

In 2025, the 84th Troop Command will maintain a broad spectrum of capable units ready to deploy at home or abroad. The 682nd Engineer Battalion will focus on mission essential tasks while the 851st Vertical Engineer Company will conduct overseas deployment training. The 1st Battalion, 151st Field Artillery Regiment will continue upgrades to their M109A6 Paladin howitzers. Their B Company will train at the National Training Center, while A Company trains at the Joint Training Readiness Center, followed by a deployment to the Middle East. The 257th Military Police Company will focus on its National Guard Reaction Force mission, while the 34th Military Police Company prepares for a deployment to the Middle East. The 55th Civil Support Team will expand relationships with Croatia and Norway while the 55th Chemical, Biological, Radiological, Nuclear, and high-yield Explosive Enhanced Response Force Package will continue its inter-agency training and partnerships, and prepare for an external evaluation.



Photos by: Tony Housey

“Service and purpose have always mattered to me. I knew that I wanted a career that was more than just making money to survive. The Guard has given me more of what I sought. I affect my community directly. I meet and talk to the people whose lives our work protects and betters. The idea of service in the Minnesota National Guard is not abstract, it’s concrete and tangible.” – Army Maj. Matthew Allgeyer

**Headquarters**

Little Falls, MN

**Commander**

Col. Brian Malecha

**Senior Enlisted Leader**

Command Sgt. Maj. Chad Turner

**Strength**

HQ - 24

Subordinate - 97



## 175th Regional Training Institute

**Summary**

The 175th Regional Training Institute's mission is to develop, educate, and train Soldiers, leaders, and technical advisors in a premier training environment, equipping them with the skills necessary for success in large scale combat and multi-domain operations. Based at Camp Ripley, the regiment provides combat arms, military occupational specialty, and leadership training. The unit is comprised of three subordinate units: the 1st Battalion, commissioned and warrant officers schools; 2nd Battalion, modular training; and the Regional Training Site - Maintenance. In addition, the regiment hosted soldiers from our State Partnership Program countries, Norway and Croatia, to further relationships and share best practices.

**2024 Accomplishments**

In 2024, the 175th welcomed 905 Soldiers from the National Guard, Reserve, and Active components to Camp Ripley to attend one of the more than 30 courses.

1st Battalion's phase I Officer Candidate School graduated 51 candidates from a five-state area, who then advanced to Phase II in their respective states. 1st Battalion also graduated 11 candidates from the Phase III course with nine commissioning in the Minnesota National Guard. The unit also runs the Minnesota National Guard's Warrant Officer Candidate School and graduated four candidates.

2nd Battalion trained 466 Soldiers from across the Army in critical combat leadership roles in the Infantry Advanced Leader Course and Maneuver Senior Leader Course. 45 Soldiers were trained in five additional functional area courses. The unit strengthened international partnerships, conducting squad tactical lanes during the Norwegian Troop Exchange and training two Norwegian Soldiers during the Infantry Advanced Leader Course.

Regional Training Site - Maintenance trained 243 Soldiers. The site focuses on instructing the Tracked Mechanic Conversion Course and Advanced Leader Course, along with the wheeled and tracked vehicle recovery additional skill identifiers. The unit also expanded its relationships internationally hosting four Soldiers from Croatia.

**2025 Objectives**

In 2025, the 175th Regiment will maintain and enhance the One Army School System standard as part of the triennial U.S. Army Training and Doctrine Command's Accreditation process. The unit also looks forward to enhancing relationships with Croatia and Norway, incorporating the latest leadership development techniques, providing realistic and valuable learning experiences utilizing the most experienced and professional cadre to produce skilled, professional, and adaptive leaders.



“A huge reason why I continue to serve in the Minnesota National Guard is for the benefit of TRICARE. It is a great relief to my family to have good and reliable healthcare services. My retirement plan through the military also puts my mind at ease for the future.” – Army Capt. Jordan Carlson

Photos by: Army Staff Sgt. Tasha Kilen



**Headquarters**

Little Falls, MN

**Commander**

Col. Troy Fink

**Senior Enlisted Leader**

Command Sgt. Maj. Rian Hofstad

**Strength**

Employees - 827



## Camp Ripley

**Summary**

Camp Ripley is a 53,000-acre regional training center facilitating numerous ranges, state-of-the-art training amenities, and ample lodging designed to support the training needs of all military branches, first responders, and civilian agencies.

**2024 Accomplishments**

Throughout 2024, Camp Ripley's command team balanced year-round training for a variety of Department of Defense personnel, supporting 567,644 person-days and 73,950 person-days for inter-agency partners. These mission standards supported individual Guard member readiness while encouraging positive values for their families, and integrating overall wellbeing through the Holistic Health and Fitness Program. This collectively fostered education and operation of new equipment adhering to the Guard's modernization plan.

The development of Camp Ripley's infrastructure, including fiber optic network downrange, increased year-round base usage. In addition, Area 5 "Long Buildings" for troop lodging, modern command, and administrative services are available to units in the in the cantonment area. The completion of four new railheads will aid the rapid mobilization or influx of brigade-sized units reducing time devoted to equipment movement.

Camp Ripley's recreation and hunting programs improved quality control and safety through the iSportsman program for access control, permit sales, revenue generation, and conservation for outdoor recreational activities.

**2025 Objectives**

In 2025, Camp Ripley will sustain the focus of partnership and cooperation locally, nationally, and globally. It will host international allies through the State Partnership Program, distinguished visitors, and officials from the state and federal government while nurturing local community relations.

The ongoing objective to increase winter training with our international allies and working to advance cold weather readiness with the National Guard Arctic Interest Council will increase training capabilities for active and reserve components.

As in previous years, Camp Ripley will emphasize the Minnesota National Guard's top priority of 'People First' by adding programs such as the USO to increase the quality of morale, welfare, and recreation opportunities for members on and off the base.



Photos by: Army Staff Sgt. Jorden Newbanks

"After my twin brother enlisted in the National Guard, I decided it would be a good idea to do the same. We're both competitive, so I figured that if he could do it, then so could I! Looking back at it now, it ended up being a great decision for me, and I've enjoyed the experiences and friends that the National Guard has provided me that a normal job couldn't have." – Army Staff Sgt. Jorden Newbanks



# Camp Ripley Amenities

Camp Ripley: A leading training center for first responders and military partners worldwide



### Camp Ripley:

With nearly 600,000 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 third 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.

### 45 Live-Fire Ranges

Rifle, pistol & automatic weapon ranges, demolitions & cratering ranges, and platoon-level convoy live fire ranges

### 23 Non-Live-Fire Ranges

Automatic rifle qualification, reflexive fire, grenade launcher and hand grenade qualification, rappel tower, confidence course, field leadership reaction course, and a combined arms collective training facility with 23 buildings

### Simulations

Five engagement skill trainers, rifle, pistol, and automatic weapon systems in a controlled environment, four close combat tactical trainer realistic synthetic battlefield that allows service members to operate combat vehicles, virtual convoy operations center, UH-60 Black Hawk, and CH-47 Chinook helicopter simulators

### Medical Simulations

CPR recertification, combat lifesaver initial and refresher training, instructor-run simulation training lanes with realistic combat environments

### Camp Ripley-owned Train Rail Line

Seven miles of rail, 60 rail-cars on two rail sidings, and six rail spurs for wheeled and tracked vehicles

### Air Travel - Miller Army Airfield

Supports parking for up to seven C-130s, a 6,100' x 100' asphalt runway, a 4,000' x 90' gravel assault runway, two hammerhead turnarounds on gravel strip, night vision optics lighting with infrared emitting lights, and 38 helicopter landing pads

### Lodging

4,057 year-round housing capacity; with 385 total maid service rooms; 17 two to six-bedroom houses; T-building barracks with 140-184 beds, orderly rooms, supply, and kitchen facilities; six longhouses with 600 total beds; 201 officer quarters; and a 3,789 seasonal housing capacity

### Education Center

48 individual rooms, nine classrooms capable of holding more than 425 students, a 200-person stepped theater, and a 400-person dining facility capable of feeding 1,600 people during a single mealtime period

### Morale Welfare & Recreation

Team and individual sports, backpacking, fishing, kayaking, indoor fitness centers, video games, Viking Club, museum and library



“My family has fought in every engagement for this country since the Revolutionary War. Each generation of my family has had someone serve, I wanted to be that one for my family and keep the tradition alive. This is why I joined the Minnesota National Guard and continue to serve.”

– Sgt. 1st Class Patrick Haley

Photos by: Army Staff Sgt. Jordan Newbanks

# 133 AW

**Headquarters**  
Saint Paul, MN

**Commander**  
Col. Jesse Carlson

**Senior Enlisted Leader**  
Command Chief Master Sgt.  
Richard Schumacher

**Strength**  
1,168



## 133rd Airlift Wing

### Summary

The 133rd Airlift Wing is a Minnesota National Guard flying unit headquartered at Minneapolis-Saint Paul International Airport. Using C-130H3 Hercules aircraft, the wing provides tactical airlift capabilities to transport troops, cargo, and medical patients worldwide. Additionally, it supports domestic operations and disaster response efforts for the citizens of Minnesota.

### 2024 Accomplishments

Minnesota's 133rd Airlift Wing has continued to uphold its reputation as a premier tactical airlift unit. In 2024, the wing deployed over 350 Airmen globally and flew more than 1,800 hours.

In June, 80 Airmen participated in Red Flag-Alaska, a high-intensity exercise designed to test tactical airlift capabilities. During this event, the unit conducted over 26 sorties and logged 141 flight hours, successfully integrating with joint and foreign aircraft while airdropping over 200 personnel and pieces of equipment. The unit received praise as the most professional Mobility Air Forces unit seen at the exercise.

Upon return, the wing completed a full-scale readiness exercise conducted under contested and degraded conditions. Eight hundred Airmen endured over 30 attack sequences, demonstrating their ability to complete the mission successfully. Inspectors from Air Mobility Command remarked that it was the most comprehensive exercise they had witnessed, stating that other units could learn a lot about exercise development from the 133rd. As part of the exercise, two crews took off, simulating a deployment to the Pacific theater. Stopping only to refuel, the sortie lasted over 30 hours, resulting in nearly a 40-hour flight duty period for the crew members. This showcased the wing's maintenance capabilities and readiness to deploy.

In July, the 210th Engineering Installation Squadron installed fiber communication infrastructure at Colorado's Cheyenne Mountain Complex, which serves as NORAD and U.S. Northern Command's alternate command center and as a training site for crew qualification.

### 2025 Objectives

The wing will continue preparations for converting to the new C-130J Super Hercules aircraft. Significant infrastructure projects are in the planning phase, and it is essential to procure the necessary resources for their completion. Additionally, multiple large-scale deployments are scheduled, with Airmen from all groups across the wing being tasked to execute federal missions. The wing will also continue to strengthen its partnership with Norway through several training opportunities, aiding in the transition to the J-model aircraft.



Photo by: Airman Cailey Aandal



Photo by: Air Force Master Sgt. Amy Lovgren

“The military has taken me to places I would have never gone otherwise, and I have met so many amazing people along the way.”  
– Air Force Master Sgt. Justyna Kroth

# 148 FW

## Headquarters

Duluth, MN

## Commander

Col. Nathan Aysta

## Senior Enlisted Leader

Command Chief Master Sgt.  
Jozef Miketin

## Strength

1,048



## 148th Fighter Wing

### Summary

The Duluth-based 148th Fighter Wing is an F-16CM 'Block 50' Fighting Falcon aircraft equipped National Guard flying wing. The unit provides mission-ready Airmen and equipment to meet state and federal missions while promoting critical partnerships. The wing flies the Air Force's newest and most capable F-16 model, providing suppression of enemy air and surface-based defenses. The 148th is a North American Aerospace Defense Command, or NORAD, aerospace control alert-trained unit capable of defending the air sovereignty of North America.

### 2024 Accomplishments

In 2024, the 148th Fighter Wing's "Bulldogs" trained, deployed, and met its personnel recruiting and retention goals.

One-third of the wing deployed to Kadena Air Base in Japan, supporting U.S. Pacific Air Forces' missions. They participated alongside 28 nations during India's largest multinational exercise, Tarang Shakti 2024. In January, personnel participated in the Weapons System Evaluation Program at Tyndall Air Force Base in Florida. The 148th Security Forces Squadron planned and facilitated the National Guard's Cold Weather Operations Course at Camp Ripley for 50 Airmen from 15 states. The 148th Services, Communications, and Force Support Squadron deployed to Joint Base Pearl Harbor-Hickam in Hawaii for training. 148th Medical Group personnel traveled to Fort Belknap Indian Reservation in Montana, providing medical and veterinary services to the community. The 148th Fatality Search and Recovery Team mobilized in response to hurricanes Milton and Helene, conducting 15 missions in North Carolina. The wing also conducted a one-week flying integration training event with F-35 Lightning II aircraft flown by partners in the Royal Norwegian Air Force. The 148th Explosive Ordnance Disposal team and 334th Brigade Engineering Battalion hosted Croatian EOD technicians for an exchange at Camp Ripley in July. On top of all of this, the 148th continued its support of NORAD's 24/7 aerospace control alert mission, maintained a 93 percent personnel retention rate, gained 101 recruits, and finished the fiscal year with 101 percent end-strength.

### 2025 Objectives

In 2025, the 148th Fighter Wing will focus on recruiting and retaining Airmen, modernizing facilities and aircraft, improving military operating airspace, and building crucial community partnerships. The 148th will also continue to build a team that reflects the community.



"The decision to join the Minnesota National Guard was easy. Growing up with F-16s flying overhead every day helped me know at a young age, that serving the 148th Fighter Wing was something I wanted to do. I am proud to be part of this organization."

– Air Force Staff Sgt. Mason Conlin

Photos by: Air Force Master Sgt. Natasha Stannard

# MED-DET

**Headquarters**  
Cottage Grove, MN

**Commander**  
Col. Conrad Ross  
and Maj. Daniel Gurtner



**Senior Enlisted Leader**  
1st Sgt. Sarah Johnson

**Strength**  
122

## Minnesota Medical Detachment

### Summary

The Minnesota Medical Detachment oversees the 'health of the force' for Minnesota National Guard members. It provides case management, behavioral health, licensed drug and alcohol support, and Soldier readiness processing for the state. In October 2023, the Medical Detachment and Office of the State Surgeon merged to become a major subordinate command.

### 2024 Accomplishments

The Minnesota Medical Detachment continued improving medical readiness processes during 2024. They conducted 1,060 physical health assessments, 703 dental exams, 625 blood draws, 1,156 audiograms, 129 chapter-two physicals, and 203 immunizations. This resulted in the Minnesota National Guard being number one for large states in the nation for medical readiness compliance, receiving recognition for their efforts during the National Guard Bureau's Medical Team Conference. The case management team processed 180 line-of-duty investigations, 87 integrated disability evaluation cases, and 46 incapacitation pay packets. The behavioral health team supported 1,398 Soldiers and conducted 189 unit outreach events. The MED-DET Operations team coordinated two hearing conservation technician courses in 2024, certifying 29 medics on conducting audiograms. MED-DET processed 550 34th Infantry Division Soldiers and over 85 mobilization waivers. They deployed a case management team to Fort Cavazos to advocate for Soldiers at the deployment readiness center, resulting in a more than 98 percent success rate.

One of the main highlights of 2024 was the roll-out of the limited dental treatment program, making Minnesota the fourth state in the country to offer this program. The unit's dedication to Soldier readiness resulted in a cost saving of over \$590,000. In April, the unit collaborated with Minnesota's State Partnership Program partner Norway, sending eight personnel overseas for training.

### 2025 Objectives

The MED-DET Operations, Case Management, Behavioral Health, and Licensed Drug and Alcohol Counselor teams will continue collaborating, developing, and updating their procedures, creating a shared understanding of how they can best serve the Minnesota National Guard.



Photos by: Army Staff Sgt. Jorden Newbanks

"The friendships and teamwork developed over my 20 years of service has been lifelong and deeply rewarding. I serve to uphold and embody important values such as loyalty, integrity, and selfless service. It provides me a purpose and desire to live out these values every day."  
– Sgt. 1st Class Angela Kunelius

**Headquarters**  
Saint Paul, MN

**Executive Director**  
Mr. Donald Kerr

**Commissioner**  
Maj. Gen. Shawn Manke

**Strength**  
380 State Employees



## Minnesota Department of Military Affairs

### Summary

The department integrates state resources to support the Adjutant General's priorities: people, modernization, and partnerships, and is actively engaged with the Legislature, state agencies, and local governments. When the National Guard is activated for state service, the agency provides direct or contracted logistical support, offering necessary resources to local authorities. The department is the primary conduit for communication with other State of Minnesota Executive branch agencies and the Minnesota Legislature.

### 2024 Accomplishments

The agency established two new sections: the Cyber Coordination Cell and the Holistic Health and Fitness team. They also initiated investments in communications equipment, ensuring future interoperability with local law enforcement and emergency response organizations. The Cyber Coordination Cell interacts and coordinates with federal, state, and local officials, and works to ensure that the Minnesota National Guard can assist in the cyber realm and strengthen critical government and private sector relationships. Holistic Health and Fitness is designed to enhance readiness through education across five domains: mental, sleep, nutritional, physical, and spiritual health.

The Minnesota National Guard supported local authorities in the Boundary Waters Canoe Area and in Southwestern Minnesota floods in late June. They also worked to support North Carolina and Florida after hurricanes Helene and Milton.

In 2024, the new Luverne Armory was opened, and the old armory was transferred to Rock County for use as a public resource. The complete renovation of the Rosemount and Marshall armories began, and the design of the Minnesota Military and Veterans Museum at Camp Ripley was completed. Funding was appropriated for the design and construction of a Field House at the Arden Hills Army Training site, and design is currently underway.

### 2025 Objectives

The general contractor started construction of the Minnesota Military and Veterans Museum, which is expected to open in 2025. The Department of Military Affairs intends to transition the Holistic Health and Fitness program's costs to the federal government once funding is approved.



"I joined the Minnesota National Guard in the aftermath of 9/11 and decided to make it my career. I continue to find incredible purpose and job satisfaction in being part of a team that can assist the nation and state in times of need." – Army Lt. Col. Eric Athman

# Legislative

## Legislative priorities for the 2026 National Defense Authorization Act

In 2024, the Minnesota National Guard received significant support from Congress toward its efforts to improve the quality of life and service of their Airmen and Soldiers, to modernize the force, and to expand partnerships at home and abroad.

In 2024, the National Guard Association of the United States awarded Senator Amy Klobuchar the Sonny Montgomery Medal and the Charles Dick Medal of Merit to Congressman Tom Emmer. These awards recognize the congressional member's outstanding contributions and exceptionally strong support of the National Guard.

Minnesota benefited from several key congressional committee assignments including: Congresswoman Betty McCollum as the ranking member of the House Appropriations Committee on Defense and Congressman Brad Finstad who serves on the House Armed Service Committee.

### 2025 Immediate Priorities

**Applicant medical reimbursement:** Potential recruits who have a previous ailment are required to return to their civilian doctor for re-assessment. While we continuously advocate for updates to military entrance processing, the fiscal year 2025 National Defense Authorization Act, known as NDAA, now authorizes reimbursement of applicant's civilian medical expenses up to \$100.

**Fighter recapitalization:** The average age of the National Guard's fighter aircraft fleet is nearly 30 years old, which reduces our advantage against adversaries. Recapitalizing National Guard fighter units directly serves our National Defense Strategy.

**State Partnership Program funding:** Minnesota requests increased and predictable funding to execute desired engagements and training with State Partnership Program partners Norway and Croatia to promote defense security goals and capabilities.

**ASVAB reform:** The Armed Services Vocational Aptitude Battery, or ASVAB, exam, which all recruits must complete, has not had a major revision since 2002. The DoD must modernize the ASVAB no later than January 1, 2027.

### Enduring Priorities

**C-130 modernization:** We seek continued modernization of current C-130H3 Hercules aircraft until the J models are fielded.

**C-130 total aircraft inventory:** We seek sustainment of the nation-wide total aircraft inventory of C-130 Hercules aircraft at 271, which ensures the 133rd Airlift Wing maintains its ability to support flying missions in the state and world-wide.

**Increased military construction:** The current budget does not adequately support modernizing Minnesota's many dated facilities, instead only replacing one of 63 Minnesota armories every 8-10 years. Increased military construction funding would also support modernization of aircraft hangers that were built in the 1950s.

**Zero-cost TRICARE:** Military healthcare reform for all service members, regardless of service status, is a priority which ensures that the National Guard remains "Always Ready" to serve.



Photo by: Sgt. 1st Class Serrina Martinez

"I serve for the fulfillment of being on a winning team and the camaraderie of serving alongside fellow Soldiers and Airmen. I serve to protect the way of life and freedoms we as Americans have enjoyed since our country was born." – Army Maj. Gen. Shawn Manke

# Economic Impact

## Federal Cooperative Agreements:

Federal funding that reimburses state expenses for services and goods paid for using state 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.

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

**Federal Funding:** Direct federal funding of operations and maintenance, federal technician salaries, active guard and reserve salaries, and pay to service members for military training. While 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, 2024 and the federal fiscal year ending Sept. 30, 2024.

Community	Federal Legislative District	State Legislative District	State Impact	Federal Impact	Total Impact
Albert Lea	1	27A	\$80,948	\$2,479,539	\$2,560,488
Alexandria	7	08B	\$34,446	\$279,565	\$314,011
Anoka	6	35A	\$46,413	\$3,361,903	\$3,408,316
Appleton	7	20A	\$101,252	\$1,985,387	\$2,086,639
Arden Hills	4	42A	\$1,346,142	\$59,604,262	\$60,950,404
Austin	1	27B	\$67,737	\$2,449,158	\$2,516,896
Bemidji	7	05A	\$86,058	\$2,902,793	\$2,988,851
Bloomington	3	50B	\$1,538,945	\$14,328,632	\$15,867,577
Brainerd	8	10A	\$224,648	\$4,808,428	\$5,033,076
Brooklyn Park	3	36B	\$101,563	\$4,980,797	\$5,082,360
Cambridge	8	32A	\$270,182	\$11,891,357	\$12,161,539
Chisholm	8	06A	\$110,471	\$3,766,705	\$3,877,176
Clequet	8	11A	\$103,409	\$2,652,577	\$2,755,985
Cottage Grove	2	54A	\$235,509	\$7,406,746	\$7,642,255
Crookston	7	01B	\$85,718	\$2,887,577	\$2,973,295
Detroit Lakes	7	04B	\$58,719	\$1,604,767	\$1,663,485
Duluth	8	03B	\$190,412	\$5,614,444	\$5,804,856
Duluth (Air Base)	8	03B	\$2,178,159	\$99,212,277	\$101,390,436
Fairmont	1	23A	\$177,856	\$2,752,060	\$2,929,916
Faribault	1	24B	\$193,681	\$4,250,413	\$4,444,094
Fergus Falls	7	08A	\$64,108	\$2,172,058	\$2,236,166
Grand Rapids	8	05B	\$65,050	\$1,714,316	\$1,779,366
Hastings	2	21A	\$109,999	\$4,121,172	\$4,231,171
Hibbing	8	06A	\$130,908	\$2,828,986	\$2,959,894
Hutchinson	7	18B	\$125,998	\$3,979,043	\$4,105,041
Inver Grove Heights	2	52B	\$1,005,023	\$4,145,530	\$5,150,553
Jackson	1	23A	\$102,661	\$3,139,541	\$3,242,203
Litchfield	7	18A	\$97,726	\$3,370,811	\$3,468,536
Little Falls (Camp Ripley)	8	09B	\$14,034,803	\$111,210,799	\$125,245,602
Luverne	1	22A	\$174,242	\$1,564,540	\$1,738,782
Madison	7	16A	\$108,432	\$2,495,978	\$2,604,410
Mankato	1	19B	\$250,058	\$6,811,250	\$7,061,308
Marshall	7	16A	\$105,491	\$2,549,552	\$2,655,044
Minneapolis	5	60A	\$218,667	\$20,325,025	\$20,543,692
Mpls/Saint Paul (Air Base)	5	63B	\$2,730,916	\$46,739,299	\$49,470,215
Montevideo	7	17A	\$267,384	\$4,076,605	\$4,343,989
Monticello	6	29B	\$84,646	\$3,515,339	\$3,599,984
Moorhead	7	04A	\$2,726,948	\$11,322,387	\$14,049,335
Morris	7	12A	\$111,948	\$1,668,173	\$1,780,121
New Ulm	1	16B	\$159,892	\$5,055,043	\$5,214,935
Olivia	7	17A	\$107,997	\$1,425,371	\$1,533,368
Ortonville	7	12A	\$111,274	\$2,656,907	\$2,768,181
Owatonna	1	24A	\$63,868	\$955,529	\$1,019,397
Pine City	8	11B	\$70,694	\$3,071,871	\$3,142,565
Pipestone	7	22A	\$49,969	\$1,306,130	\$1,356,099
Red Wing	2	21A	\$73,477	\$1,096,614	\$1,170,091
Redwood Falls	7	16B	\$74,083	\$2,258,825	\$2,332,908
Rochester	1	26A	\$99,963	\$4,206,096	\$4,306,059
Rosemount	2	57B	\$527,992	\$13,170,382	\$13,698,375
Saint Cloud	7	15B	\$232,467	\$13,260,699	\$13,493,166
Saint James	1	23B	\$125,021	\$3,121,938	\$3,246,958
Saint Paul (& East Saint Paul)	4	65B	\$480,289	\$54,753,620	\$55,233,909
Saint Peter	1	19A	\$6,805,127	\$9,780,359	\$16,585,486
Sauk Centre	6	14B	\$87,241	\$2,526,393	\$2,613,634
Stillwater	6	39B	\$607,258	\$12,798,072	\$13,405,330
Thief River Falls	7	01A	\$56,679	\$1,702,229	\$1,758,908
Wadena	8	09A	\$199,849	\$2,730,137	\$2,929,985
West St Paul	2	52A	\$145,157	\$4,461,213	\$4,606,370
Willmar	7	17B	\$69,066	\$2,269,352	\$2,338,418
Winona	1	28A	\$67,858	\$3,569,894	\$3,637,752
<b>Totals</b>			<b>\$39,962,496</b>	<b>\$623,146,465</b>	<b>\$663,108,962</b>

# 2024 Total Funding Impact

Federal Funding	94%	Federal Funding	\$623,146,465
State Funding	6%	State Funding	\$39,962,496
Assigned Members	12,593	Impact per Member	\$52,657

## State Tuition Reimbursement Demographics

