

THE DISPATCH

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OFFICIAL MAGAZINE OF THE TEXAS MILITARY DEPARTMENT



APRIL 2019

TEXANS SERVING TEXAS

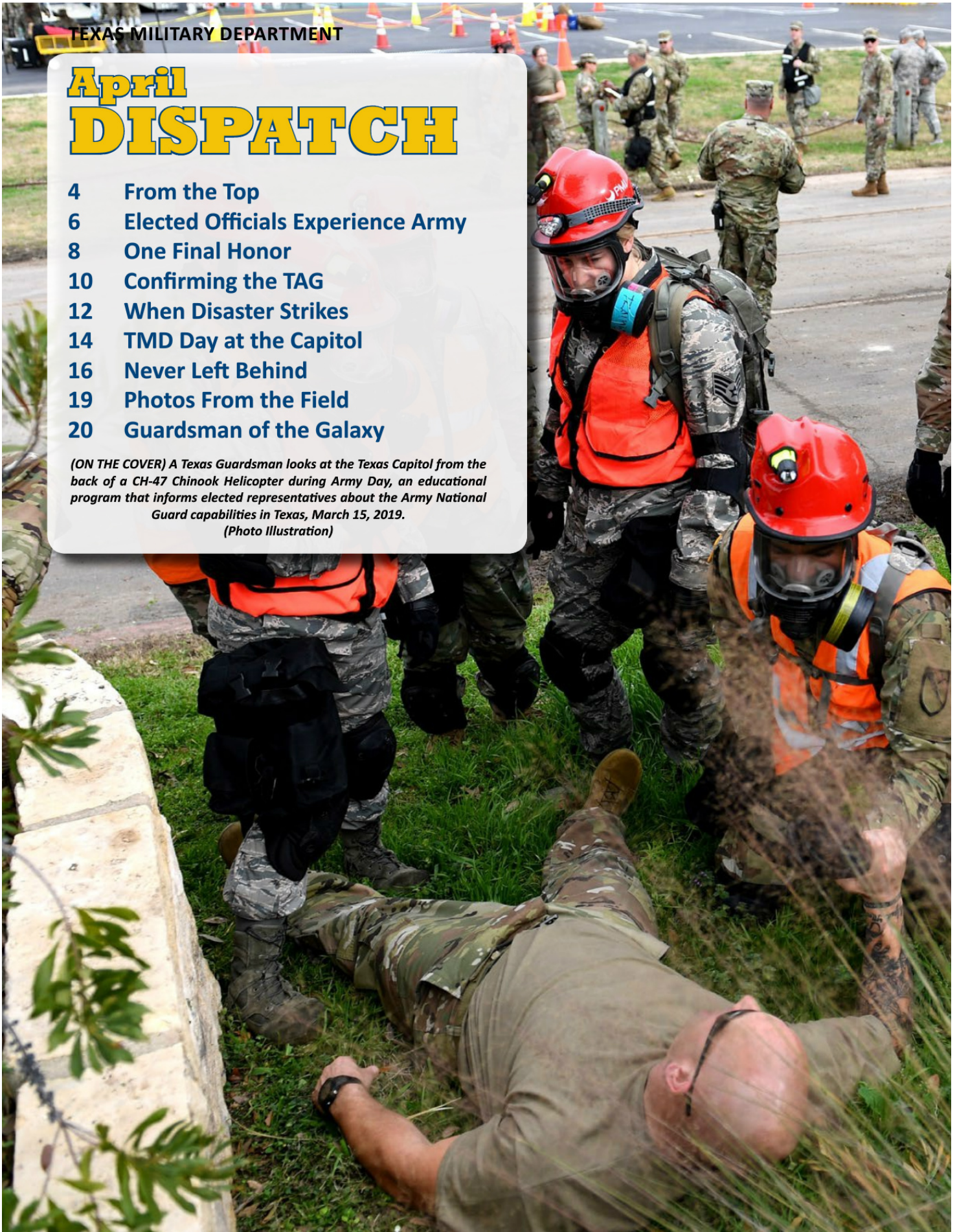
THE NATION'S LARGEST STATE MILITARY FORCE
SERVING THE NEEDS OF THE LONE STAR STATE

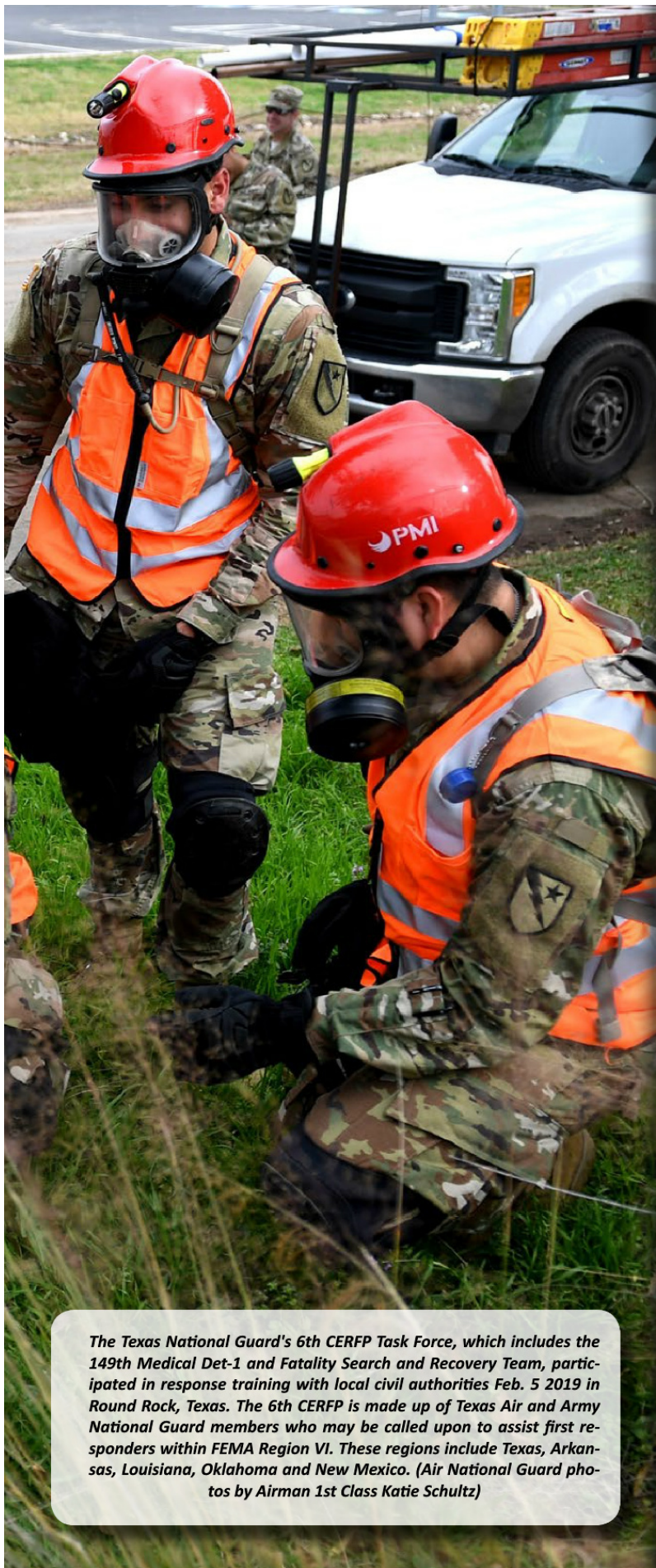
TEXAS MILITARY DEPARTMENT

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*(ON THE COVER) A Texas Guardsman looks at the Texas Capitol from the back of a CH-47 Chinook Helicopter during Army Day, an educational program that informs elected representatives about the Army National Guard capabilities in Texas, March 15, 2019.
(Photo Illustration)*





The Texas National Guard's 6th CERFP Task Force, which includes the 149th Medical Det-1 and Fatality Search and Recovery Team, participated in response training with local civil authorities Feb. 5 2019 in Round Rock, Texas. The 6th CERFP is made up of Texas Air and Army National Guard members who may be called upon to assist first responders within FEMA Region VI. These regions include Texas, Arkansas, Louisiana, Oklahoma and New Mexico. (Air National Guard photos by Airman 1st Class Katie Schultz)



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Greg Abbott



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TEXAS MILITARY DEPARTMENT

FROM THE TOP

COMMENTARIES FROM TEXAS MILITARY DEPARTMENT LEADERS



GIVING OUR TEXAS GUARDSMEN THE BEST RESOURCES & CARE

MAJ. GEN. DAWN FERRELL

DEPUTY ADJUTANT GENERAL AIR,
COMMANDER OF THE TEXAS AIR NATIONAL GUARD

We are in the midst of a busy state legislative session. The Texas Legislature meets each odd-numbered year, generally from the start of January to the end of May to write, pass and deliver new laws to the desk of the governor. This is an opportunity for our agency to educate our elected officials on the many ways our Guardsmen support their fellow Texans, and explain the equipment, facilities, staff, and resources we need the state to support in order to effectively carry out the Guard's growing list of state missions in Texas.

One critical resource is the annual budget the state provides to the Texas Military Department. Our agency works to ensure that every dollar of the baseline budget is spent in the best interest of taxpayers, however, to keep the agency current and continue to meet the needs of the state there is an opportunity to request additional funds. These budgetary increases are known as "exceptional items." They help fill in critical shortfalls for areas such as staffing increases and facility upgrades, or work to expand the capabilities of the organization. The Governor or members of the Legislature may provide additional guidance for any budgetary item requests.

This session the department is requesting four exceptional items for consideration by the legislature.

1) TEXAS STATE GUARD EXPANSION:

Meet the Governor's directive to double the membership of the Texas Military Department's all-volunteer force. This exceptional item would provide the staffing and resources to increase the force from 2,300 to 5,000 Texas State Guardsmen.

2) EMERGENCY & DISASTER PREPAREDNESS:

Restore the \$804,908 that was cut from our base budget last session. This will allow the department to repair and replace equipment used in wildfire suppression and flood mitigation. This amount also ensures Airmen and Soldiers are properly equipped with safety gear specific to domestic emergencies.

3) FACILITY MANAGEMENT & OPERATIONS:

Funding to support the STAR Program, allowing Texas Military Department facilities to meet current life, health and safety codes. The current federal match provides \$2 dollars in federal funding for every \$1 dollar provided by the state.

4) MENTAL HEALTH & SERVICE MEMBER CARE:

This funding maintains and expands service member care initiatives that support programs providing mental health-care, education benefits, tuition assistance and funeral honors to our dedicated Guardsmen.

While each of these exceptional items is important, I want to focus on the importance of the Mental Health and Service Member Care request. The Texas Military Department puts a premium on putting its people first to ensure there is a ready and capable force ready to respond when called.

The welfare of our Soldiers, Airmen, and State Guardsmen is of utmost importance to me, as it is to all leaders in our organization. At the end of the day, no matter how hard we train, or how proficient we become at a given job, we are only able to operate at maximum efficiency and lethality if our health and wellness are prioritized.

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Our friendly Government Affairs Office spends much of the Legislative Session walking the halls of the Texas Capitol building, educating elected officials and their staff on the specifics of each item we request. They have been focusing on five primary elements of this particular request.

SEXUAL ASSAULT RESPONSE PROGRAM

Our Sexual Assault Response Program has been funded by a grant that is about to run out. We are requesting \$350,000 from the state to continue to provide this important service.

COUNSELING SERVICES

Currently, nine full-time employees provide counseling services to Guardsmen, families, department employees, and veterans. We are requesting funding to hire two regional supervisors to coordinate their efforts and better support these few individuals who provide assistance to our entire force.

FUNERAL HONORS

The Texas Military Department Military Funeral and Honors program is in high demand as they travel the state to honor service members who fought in conflicts from WWII up to the current War on Terror. We are asking for an additional \$220,000 to provide the services that are owed to

our brave men and women who serve this great state and nation.

STATE AWARDS

In order to eliminate exasperating delays in the presentation of state military awards and decorations, we are requesting additional funds to ensure that our service members are recognized for their efforts in a timely manner.

TUITION ASSISTANCE EDUCATION

Following guidance from the recent Sunset Commission Review, we will increase awareness and participation in our tuition assistance programs for service members.

I want to thank everyone involved in these important programs. Through your dedication and passion for taking care of others, we are better able to remain ready and resilient. I am indebted to these teams and the exceptional, wide reaching work they do with limited resources. They care not only for our service members but also for spouses and dependents. Service is a family affair, and the resources these teams provide allow us to better do our jobs. Looking out for our own is a hallmark of military service. I am proud to be a part of that legacy. Take care of each other out there.

- DUTY HONOR TEXAS -

Members of the Texas Military Department command group meet with elected officials during TMD Day at the Capitol March 12, 2019 (left to right) Maj. Gen. Robert J. Bodisch Commander of the Texas State Guard, Texas House of Representative Member Dan Flynn, Maj. Gen. Dawn Ferrell Deputy Adjutant General - Air, and Brig. Gen. Thomas Suelzer, Director of the Joint Staff.



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Group Shot From March 15, 2019



Vehicle and Equipment Displays



CH-47 Chinook Helicopter Ride



Virtual Rifle Range Trainer



Group Shot From January, 17 2019

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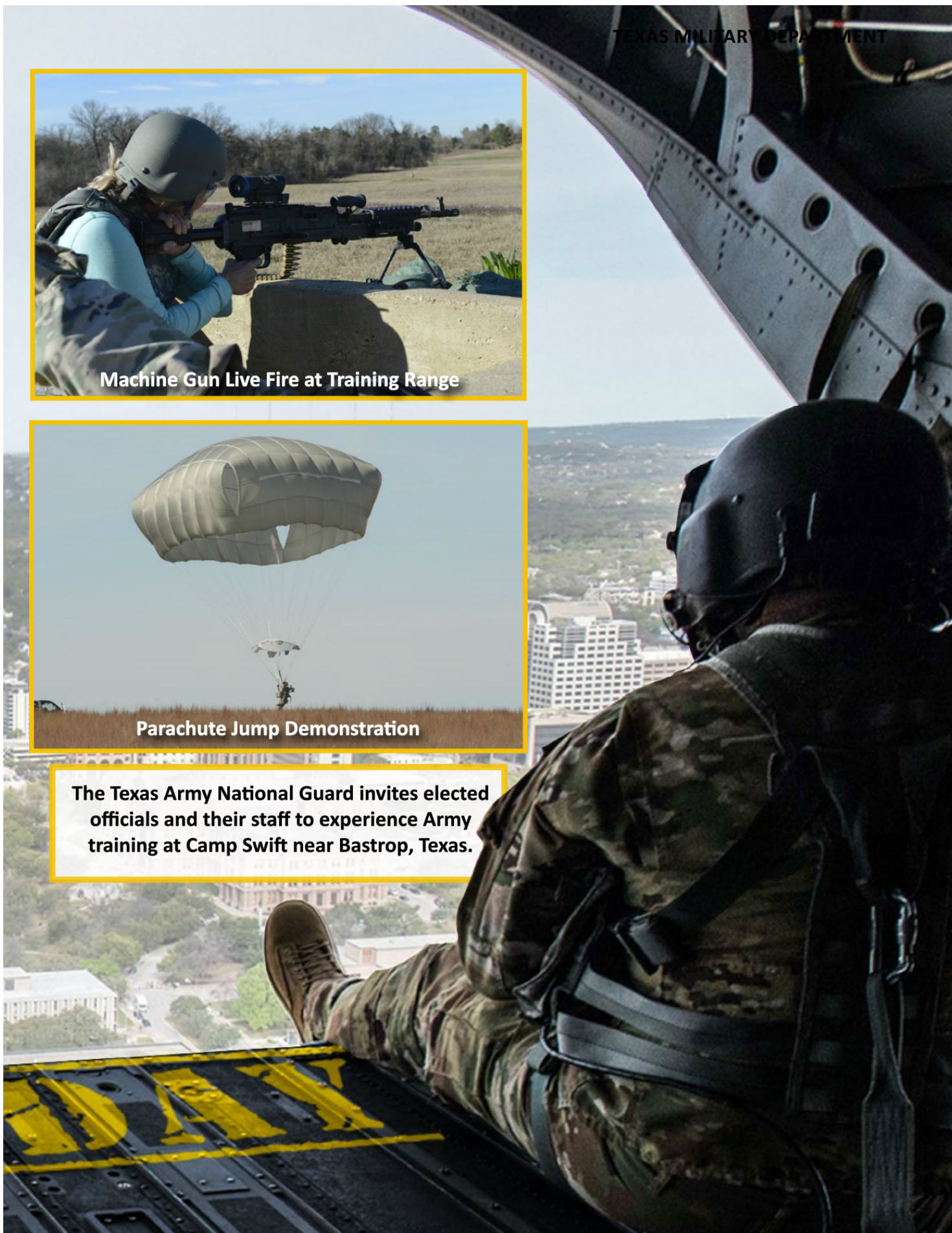


Machine Gun Live Fire at Training Range



Parachute Jump Demonstration

The Texas Army National Guard invites elected officials and their staff to experience Army training at Camp Swift near Bastrop, Texas.



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ONE FINAL HONOR

Texas Military Department's Military Funeral and Honors team provides rendering of honors to Richard A. Overton, America's Oldest World War II veteran, at the Texas National Cemetery in Austin, Texas on Jan. 12, 2019. The burial ceremony brought together loved ones, service members, and the public. (U.S. Army National Guard photo by Spc. Gerardo Escobar)

Story By: Brandon Jones
Texas Military Department Public Affairs

AUSTIN, Texas- Sitting on his front porch in East Austin, Richard Overton saw a lot of things. Different U.S. presidents, moments that defined American history, and the Overton family expanding several generations. Overton usually spent his days with a cigar in his hand and a glass of whiskey in the other. Some might say he found his secret to longevity. He's a legend around the world but, in Austin, he's a national treasure. At 112 years-old Overton was America's oldest World War II veteran and the oldest man in the United States. His military service began with the all-black 188th Engineer Aviation Battalion. Overton, who volunteered for the Army in 1942, following the bombing of Pearl Harbor, was a skilled sharpshooter.

Sadly, a life of honor and service ended on December 27, 2018. Overton died just five months before his 113th birthday. As the nation's oldest living veteran Overton's funeral was unique as military members from across the nation moved in to pay one last honor; but at the core of the

service was a group of Army National Guard Soldiers who regularly render a last memorial to the nation's veterans, the Texas Military Department Funeral and Honors Team.

The 21 members of Funeral Honors Team regularly respond to requests for a military funeral ceremony, often coming from family members who want to recognize their loved one's service to the nation. With offices in Austin, San Antonio, Dallas, and Houston the Department has made sure that Soldiers can respond to requests statewide.

Even though the rituals for each military honor service never change, the impact of each funeral is carried by the team members. Staff Sgt. Ryan Gordon, a member of the team describes his experience at Overton's funeral.

"Conducting Mr. Overton's funeral honors was a profound experience for my team and me. To witness an entire community, state and nation come together and honor a man like Mr. Overton, was truly amazing," said Gordon. "The Texas Army National Guard Military Funeral Honors Program is by far the best group of Soldiers I've ever had the

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pleasure to lead and it was beyond inspiring to see their professionalism at work while honoring such a legend."

The history of this U.S. military tradition dates back to the Napoleonic Wars in the 18th and 19th centuries when a flag was draped across the deceased warrior. TAPS was used for the first time in 1862 during the Civil War after it was determined that firing three rifle volleys would be unsafe. In 2000, Congress took steps to ensure every service member would receive their ceremonial due. The National Defense Authorization Act states all eligible veterans will be entitled to military funeral honors. A bugler will sound TAPS says Guy Schultz, a coordinator with the Military Funeral Honors Team, after which the flag is carefully folded into the symbolic tri-corner shape. A properly proportioned flag will fold 13 times on the triangles, representing the 13 original colonies. Schultz stated the folded flag is symbolic of the tri-cornered hat worn by the Patriots of the American Revolution. When folded, no red or white stripe should be shown, leaving only the blue field. Schultz says each fold has a meaning.

"For me, it's about giving our Army veterans, family, and friends, the honor and dignity they deserve. Observing these services really makes you feel proud and humble," said Schultz. "The look of appreciation you see from the family when they are presented the flag is something you can't put into words."

A family member or next-of-kin of the veteran can work with the funeral director to request military honors during the funeral. The Army Casualty Assistant Center assigns the mission for the funeral directors. More than 4,000 military honors services are performed a year in Texas.

As part of the 2020-2021 biennium, the Texas Military Department is requesting approximately \$1.7 million for service member care. According to the appropriations request, \$220,000 would directly support the Military Funeral Honors team. The money would allow them to make sure the brave men and women who serve this country and state get the final honor they are due.

This service is befitting for a decorated Army veteran like Overton, who would often share stories of Soldiers coming home to Austin during World War I. He outlived his siblings, two wives, and most of his friends. Now his legacy has outlived him. The Military Funeral Honors team is glad they can be a part of this moment in time. **-D**

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CONFIRMING THE ADJUTANT GENERAL OF THE GREAT STATE OF TEXAS

*Story By: Bailey Olderog
Texas Military Department*

With her appointment as The Adjutant General, Maj. Gen. Tracy Norris became the first female to hold command over the entire Texas Military. While much of the nomination process happens quietly, the department celebrated the momentous event at the Change of Command ceremony in early January 2019. Elected officials, military leaders, and heads of national and international organizations attended to pay respects to the outgoing Maj. Gen. John F. Nichols, and to welcome the new Adjutant General.

Toward the end of his tenure as The Adjutant General, Nichols submitted packets to Governor Greg Abbott nominating potential successors. Following a lengthy review process by elected officials and their staff, Norris received a letter from the chair of the Senate Nominations Committee and Texas Senator Dawn Buckingham requesting her attendance to testify at a hearing. The hearing would be her opportunity to advocate for herself as to why she should be selected for the position. In preparation of the hearing, Norris met with Governor Abbott's Appointments Director who talked her through the final steps of the official nominations process.

At the hearing, Norris laid out the following goals for the Guard under her leadership.

RECRUITING AND RETENTION:

Meeting force structure goals cannot be achieved without strong retention numbers and intensive recruiting. A larger Texas National Guard will better help us protect Texans and assist our fellow states when disaster strikes. For our federal commitment, increasing the number of Soldiers will better position the Texas Army National Guard to meet its goal of returning armor units to Texas. For the Texas Air National Guard, a larger end strength will allow Airmen to focus on adding an additional flying medical unit to support their C-130s.

SUCCESSION PLANNING:

Setting up future leaders for success will be vital to the future of the department. As the Adjutant General, Norris was clear in her testimony that she intends to support up-and-coming leaders in a variety of ways including education, information sharing, creating clear position requirements, and mentorship.

INDIVIDUAL READINESS & FACILITIES SUPPORT:

Throughout her career, Norris has stressed the importance of individual readiness, and this will continue to be a priority for her. Each member of TMD is responsible for their personal physical fitness and mental readiness and training. As part of this, department leadership is dedicated to protecting and supporting efforts to improve the life, health, and safety of agency facilities through the State of Texas Armory Revitalization Program (STAR).

When questioned as to why she is best qualified for the position of Adjutant General, Norris explained that her experience in varied roles across the military would strengthen the department overall.

"Throughout my career, I've been afforded the opportunity to do the toughest jobs in a variety of fields – both at home and deployed to combat zones," said Norris. "I believe that this has given me a breadth of experience and a unique depth of understanding of the many elements of this complex agency."

In her testimony, Norris made it clear to the gathered state senators that she was committed to strengthening the department for current Guardsmen and preparing the force for the challenges they will face in the future.

Norris continues to participate in the nomination process meeting with state senate members preparing for a final vote in the Texas State Senate. **-D**



Maj. Gen. Tracy Norris, The Adjutant General - Texas, testifies in front of the Texas Senate Committee on nominations to discuss her selection as the commander of the Texas Military Department. (Courtesy Photo)

TEXAS MILITARY DEPARTMENT HALL OF HONOR



Do you know a Texas Military Department military retiree that's career should be recognized? Nominate them for the TMD Hall Of Honor to recognize their service and celebrate their career.



**SUBMIT NOMINATIONS FROM
APRIL 1ST - JUNE 1ST
www.tmd.texas.gov/hall-of-honor**

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WHEN DISASTER STRIKES TEXAS

Story By: Lisa Manresa

Texas Military Department Public Affairs

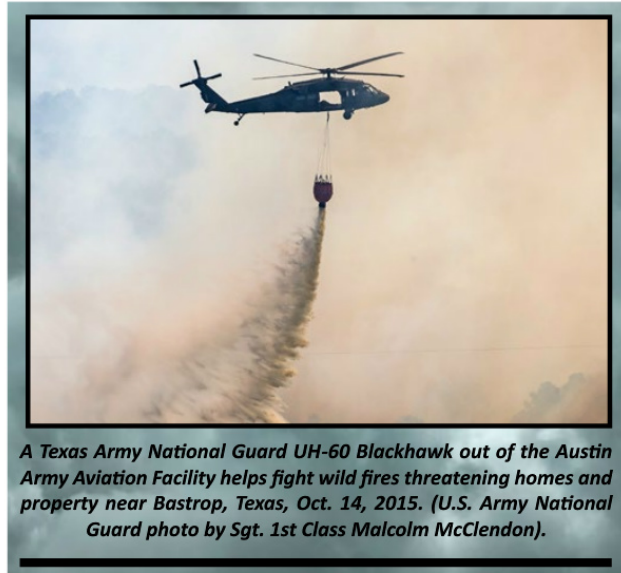
When you have an emergency in your home your first call is 911, where trained emergency first responders will help mitigate the crisis. However, what happens when the threat involves more than just your home, block, towns, counties or regions? When called upon that's where the Texas Military Department steps in and assists local, state and federal partners.

Every year, Texas Guardsmen play a vital role in responding to state emergencies. When activated by the governor, these Soldiers and Airmen commit themselves to save lives and reduce the destruction of property. When tornadoes, hurricanes, fires and floods sweep through communities, the guard rescues Texans from impacted zones.

In 2018, the Texas Military Department responded to 42 requests for assistance issued by the Texas Department of Emergency Management. This resulted in the deployment of more than 1,000 Guardsmen to areas across the state to assist Texans in getting to safety. In total, 1,052 people were evacuated from disaster areas with an additional 358 being rescued from flooded homes and businesses. Guardsmen were even able to rescue five animals to accompany their families to safety.



Texas National Guard Soldiers arrive in Houston, Texas to aid citizens in heavily flooded areas from the storms of Hurricane Harvey. (U.S. Army National Guard Photo by Lt. Zachary West)



A Texas Army National Guard UH-60 Blackhawk out of the Austin Army Aviation Facility helps fight wild fires threatening homes and property near Bastrop, Texas, Oct. 14, 2015. (U.S. Army National Guard photo by Sgt. 1st Class Malcolm McClendon).

The need for these missions continues growing as more people choose to make the Lone Star State home. According to a 2018 report by the Insurance Information Institute, Texas ranked number one for total acres burned with 1.8 million acres being lost to wildfires. Also, in a 2017 Insurance Information Institute report, Texas ranked number two for "Most Wildfire Prone States." Additional information issued by Verisk Wildfire Risk Analysis revealed data from the 2010 U.S. Census stating 715,300 households were at high or extreme risk from wildfires.

To mitigate the impact of wildfires in Texas, TMD maintains fire suppression equipment known as Bambi Buckets. These custom fire-fighting tools allow helicopters to quickly fill and release water or fire suppressant in targeted locations. As an asset, these Bambi Buckets allow National Guard Black Hawks and Chinooks to respond to fires in the most challenging terrain quickly.

Maj. Jordan Boyd, deputy state aviation officer Texas Army National Guard, explained why Bambi Buckets are so critical to Texas Military Department and its emergency response readiness,

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“Our fire suppression mission is to provide direct support with our rotary wing aircraft to Texas A&M Forest Service with aerial fire suppression capability. Our area of operations is mainly the I-35 corridor; however, if other contract assets are repositioned out of state or other parts of the state during a heavy/extreme fire season, we may be called to support other areas of the state.”

Wildfires that burned through 4,323 acres of the Hidden Pines Forrest outside Bastrop, Texas in 2015 were combated by four National Guard Helicopters responding to a request from the Texas A&M Forestry service, helping reduce burn time and provide 50 percent containment within four days.

Each year the department prepares for the upcoming wildfire season by inspecting and replacing fire suppression equipment. Boyd explained what it takes to keep this mission-critical equipment functioning.

“Each time an aircrew is launched on a fire, they take two buckets with them, in case one breaks or is malfunctioning,” said Boyd. “Due to extreme conditions and amount of stress placed upon them the life span of a Bambi Bucket is around four years.”

Boyd further explained that during heavy fire fighting seasons the buckets lifespan is decreased to about one year.


Alongside combating natural disasters Texas Guardsmen are called to man-made disasters. The Texas National Guard’s 6th Civil Support Team was activated to conduct air monitoring after elevated levels of benzene were detected near a Houston-area petrochemicals storage facility that caught fire on March 17, 2019.

This quick response team works across the state to assess the potential dangers from accidental discharges and intentional releases of hazardous materials.


Previous major deployments of the Civil Support Team included 20 Guardsmen sent to an explosion in West, Texas, where a fertilizer plant exploded on April, 17, 2013 and Hurricane Harvey as a total force activation for disaster response in August of 2017.

No matter the disaster, Texas Military Department members will find an answer to the help take care of their fellow Texans.

-D



Bambi Buckets



In 2018, Texas Ranked Number One For Wildfires

According to the Insurance Information Institute report of 2018, Texas ranked the number one spot for "Wildfires Ranked By Number Of Fires And By Number Of Acres Burned," reporting 1,823,153 number of acres burned in the state of Texas

1. Texas

2. California

3. North Carolina


Texas Ranked Number 2 Of Households At High Or Extreme Risk From Wildfires

1. California


2. Texas

3. Colorado


Texas Military Department responded to 42 requests for assistance issued by Emergency Management




Deployment of 1,111 Guardsmen to areas across the state to assist Texans in getting to safety



An additional 358 being rescued from flooded homes and businesses




1,052 people were evacuated from disaster areas



And the rescue of 5 animals to accompany their families to safety

Bambi Bucket Facts

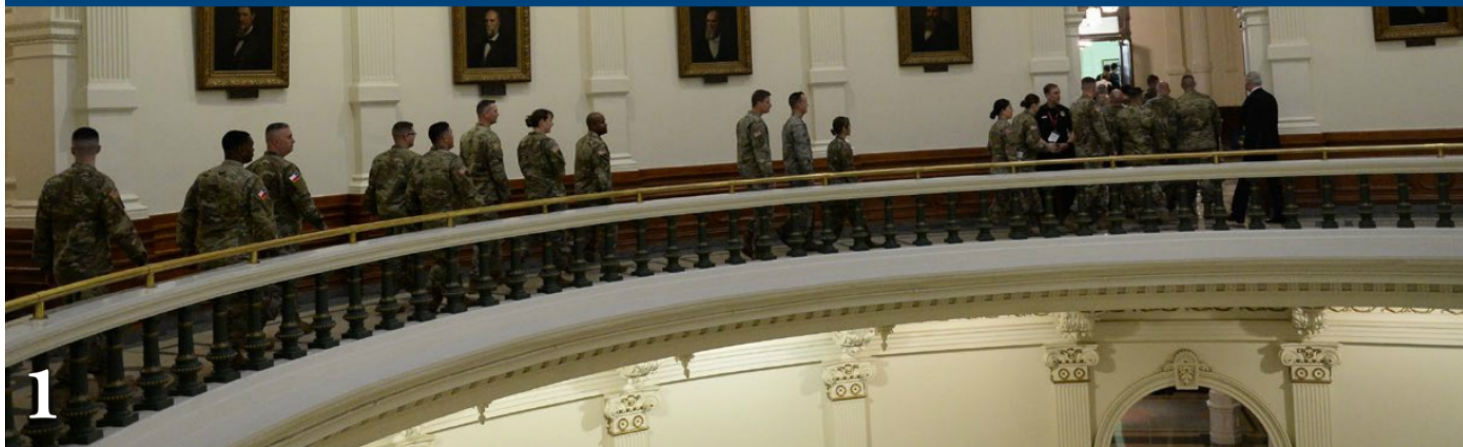


- Small Bucket: UH-72/Lakota, mainly used for spot fires after the main fire line has passed, size of Bucket-125 gallons/1,000 pds
- Med Bucket: UH/HH-60 Blackhawk, used for main fire line suppression and spot fires, size of Bucket-660 gallons/5,000 pds, bucket cost \$37k
- Large Bucket: CH-47/ Chinook, used for main fire line suppression, size of Bucket-2000 gallons/16,000 pds, bucket cost \$53k
- Dropped over 2 million gallons of water during the Bastrop fires
- Offers fast fill and shallow water capability
- Provides pilot-controlled dump patterns
- Features a dump valve that opens instantly

Source : www.iii.org/fact-statistic/facts-statistics-wildfires, www.sel-nd.com

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TEXAS MILITARY DEPARTMENT DAY AT THE TEXAS CAPITOL



1

On March 12, 2019 Members of the Texas Military Department provided Texas elected officials and legislative staffers with a hands-on experience at the Texas State Capitol.

1. Guardsmen walk around the Texas State Capitol Rotunda from the House Gallery to the Senate Gallery.

2. Texas Air National Guard service members explains the components of a fighter pilot helmet.

3. Members of the Texas House Of Representatives applaud service members from the Texas Military Department after voting on a resolution naming March 12th as Texas Military Department day.



2



3



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4. Texas Guardsmen enter the gallery of the Texas Senate where they will participate in a small ceremony honoring the members of the Texas Military Department.

5. A Soldier with the Texas Army National Guard Chemical, Biological, Radioactive and Nuclear response team shows a young visitor to the capitol shows the capabilities of a hazardous area response robot.

6. Members of the Texas Military Department Command Group, (left to right) Chief Master Sgt. Michael Cornitius, Command Senior Enlisted Leader; Brig. Gen. Thomas Suelzer, Director of the Joint Staff; Maj. Gen. Tracy Norris, The Adjutant General - Texas; Brig. Gen. Greg Chaney, Deputy Adjutant General - Army; Maj. Gen. Dawn Ferrell Deputy Adjutant General - Air; Maj. Gen. Robert J. Bodisch Commander of the Texas State Guard pose from the Texas Senate Gallery during TMD Day at the Capitol.



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NEVER LEFT BEHIND



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Commentary By: Capt. Rita Miller Ready & Resilient Program Manager

Things that make you go “hmmm:” Have you ever wondered, What types of operations take place within Texas Army National Guard Family Support Services? The section is the umbrella organization for programs that provide a continuum of care to service members and their families.

To fulfill their mission of providing assistance Family Support Services is staffed by civilian and military personnel across Texas. These dedicated personnel are experts in their designated job and deliver extensive and consistent care to our Guardsmen and families needing assistance.

The need for this staff is seen in the numbers helped. Just within Fiscal Year 2019, the State Family Program has handled over 540 family assistance cases. Transition Assistance has managed to aid over 6,300 service members with benefits and education training preparing them for the transition out of the military and into their civilian lives. Yellow Ribbon provided a holistic service program at deployment events to prepare 2,200 service members and families for the difficulties in having a Guardsman serving overseas. Personal finance consultants have helped over 3,900 Service Members create more resilient budgeting plans, including providing education on the military's new Blended Retirement System, and mentoring service members on how to create a Thrift Savings Plan. Citizen Soldier for Life has prepared over 300 service members to enter the workforce through mock interviews, resume assistance and job referrals. The Child and Youth Services have provided support to over 1,000 service member connected youths and partnered with YMCA, 4-H Club, and Scouting to develop engaging programs for children and young adults. The ID cards section has supported over 6,000 service members and families with issuing new ID cards to current service members, veterans and eligible dependant family members.

Although these numbers reflect consolidated data from all of Family Support Services sections, it does

not capture the day to day operations of the staff that take place consistently. Some include managing funds, publishing of military orders, submitting travel authorizations/vouchers, corresponding with National Guard Bureau counterparts, updating of policies and operation orders, educating command teams, coordinating events for Soldiers and families, providing 24 hour support via counseling line, managing child care at events, sorting through Serious Incident Reports, managing Unit Risk Inventories, providing support to grieving families that have experienced the loss of a service members, submitting cases to Defense Manpower Data Center, updating Tricare and DEERS for guardsmen and families, taking Department of the Army photographs, and a multitude of other tasks. Along with these countless and incredible achievements mentioned, Family Support Services continues to offer additional training opportunities and community engagements for Soldiers and their Families in order to better build and enhance a scale of sophisticated support channels throughout Texas.

Family Support Services has been known as the tip of the spear when it comes to providing a continuum of care and support services to Soldiers and their families. FSS's goal is to assist as best possible in order to build a culture that is dedicated to the safety and well-being of the force. It is critical that command teams educate and support Soldiers and families on what is available to them so that there is little to no inhibitions on who the right person to talk to for support may be. To all, remember that when we are interacting with each other, the memory that will carry the furthest will be the type of impact we made on an individual's life. So when the question is asked why we do what we do here at Family Support Services? Simply put, we are Texans serving Texas. We love our role in providing Soldier and family member care and creating a positive and productive shift in a person's life. #TMDTogether

If you know any service member or service connected families that would benefit from a program provided by the Family Support Services Section please have them contact tmd.texas.gov/family-support-service.

HUNT THE GOOD STUFF & SHARE AT
#TMDTOGETHER

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YOU ARE NEVER ALONE

CONTACT A MENTAL HEALTH BATTLE BUDDY

MENTAL HEALTH SERVICES

512-782-5069

SUBSTANCE ABUSE

512-782-6091

CRISIS HOTLINE:

800-273-8255

CRISIS TEXT LINE:

838255

HELP IS JUST A PHONE CALL OR TEXT AWAY

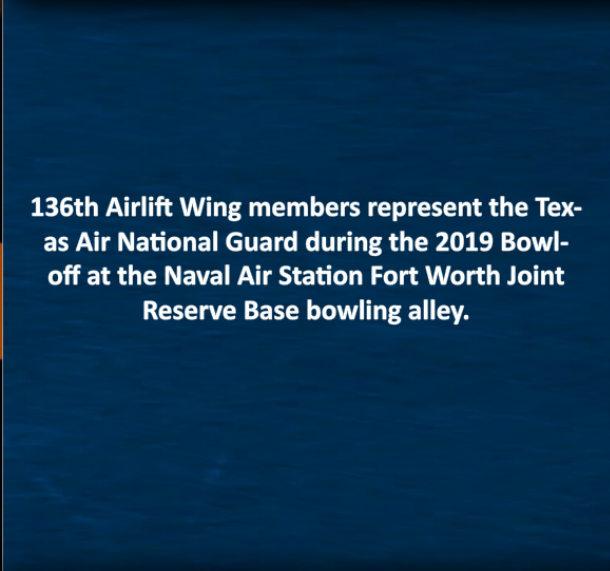


PHOTOS FROM THE FIELD

FIRSTHAND EXPERIENCES OF OUR TEXAS GUARDSMEN



Texas National Guard Soldiers with the Combined Joint Task Force, Horn of Africa East Africa Response Force pose for a quick picture between missions.



136th Airlift Wing members represent the Texas Air National Guard during the 2019 Bowl-off at the Naval Air Station Fort Worth Joint Reserve Base bowling alley.



71st Troop Command Soldiers attend Texas Military Department Day at the State Capitol, (Photo Submitted by Sgt. Maj. Jason Morrow)

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GUARDSMAN OF THE GALAXY

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Story By: Kyle Burns
Texas Military Department Public Affairs

Capt. Edwin Vasquez crouched as he stepped into the hatch of the Orion spacecraft that he helped design. The full-scale mock-up sits in a large hangar in Houston, Texas. As part of the National Aeronautics and Space Administration's training complex, the craft sits among the other space vehicle replicas used by technicians, engineers and astronauts to familiarize them with equipment before a mission. After entering, Vasquez carefully turned in the cramped space and began to explain his job.

"This is where we come to do training and testing to figure out what needs to be done for the crew to survive long-duration missions," he said. "The Orion spacecraft is being designed to go beyond low-earth orbit, go up to the moon, and even further than that to asteroids or even Mars at some point."

Vasquez pointed out the many crucial systems he helped design which included the hatch for the launch

abort system, aft stowage compartments, portable water and waste management system.

While Vasquez may spend the majority of his time as an engineer of the Orion spacecraft, he is also a proud citizen-Soldier serving in the Texas Army National Guard. As an Apache Pilot and current Space Support Element Chief for the 36th Infantry Division, his job is to be the link between the troops on the ground and the strategic assets in space.

"As a space operations officer I'm the advisor for the general on missile warning, space weather, space control and position navigation and timing," he said. "Every piece of equipment nowadays has GPS in it. All the precision weapon systems that are run by GPS could be affected by jamming."

Previous conflicts focusing on asymmetrical warfare with less technically sophisticated enemies has dominated the focus of combat operations for nearly two decades, but the battlefield is shifting. As the Department of Defense places greater emphasis on near-peer threats and more technologically capable adversaries,



Capt. Edwin Vasquez shows off his handiwork in the Orion Space Craft mock-up located at the NASA Training Facility in Houston, Texas.
 (Texas Military Department Photo by: Kyle Burns)

advisors like Vasquez are becoming vital to mission planning and success.

"We are going to go through a three-week event that will validate our decision making and how we operate as the 36th Infantry Division. One of those battle drills is GPS jamming," he said. "I help the operations section understand what we need to do if there's a jamming situation in the field and how we report that up."

Vasquez's two worlds have collided in a unique way. His military experience as an Apache pilot gives him insight on how to make effective user systems for astronauts, while his work for NASA gives him insight on various cosmic hazards and how they impact the mission. He explained this synergy after taking a seat in the pilot's chair of the Orion, a grin of familiarity spreading across his face.

"The displays are actually a little bigger than we have on the Apache, but the buttons and setup are exactly the same."

Capt. Edwin Vasquez represents the unique experiences that the National Guard brings to operations. Whether it's in support of emergency agencies during a natural disaster in Texas or on the battlefield overseas, the ability to leverage knowledge from two seemingly different professions results in a force multiplier. It's up to the individual to merge them.



"The National Guard has a vast amount of jobs that can fit any person's goals. Your job and your skills can take you places and having that military background can actually enhance the possibility of you getting those roles." Vasquez said. "I try to find the jobs and responsibilities that bring the two worlds together."

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Capt. Edwin Vasquez, former Apache Pilot and Current Space Support Element Chief for the Texas Army National Guard's 36th Infantry Division visits the Combat Aviation Brigade located at Ellington field at Houston, Texas. (Texas Military Department Photo By: Kyle Burns)

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