

# 1-116th NCO named top enlisted graduate at Ranger School

After months of grueling effort, Staff Sgt. Matthew Dawson, a sniper team leader in the Virginia Army National Guard, completed Ranger School, earned the coveted Ranger Tab and was named the enlisted honor graduate for his Ranger School course.

Dawson started Ranger School with 328 other Soldiers, graduated as one of 71 to avoid a recycle and was one of only three National Guard Soldiers to graduate with his class of 125 total graduates. Dawson's father, who earned his own tab in 1990, was there to congratulate his son and pin his tab Jan. 27, 2023, at Fort Benning, Georgia.

"My father is my hero and now to share and be a part of this great brotherhood with him has me lost for words," Dawson said. His father, Dawson explained, served as an infantry officer for 33 years and completed nine deployments over the course of his career and retired as a lieutenant colonel.

For much of 2022, Dawson was deployed to the Horn of Africa with Task Force Red Dragon. That, he said, set him up for success. Dawson traveled to Fort Benning immediately following his deployment.

Read more at <https://ngpa.us/24409>



Staff Sgt. Matthew Dawson graduates Ranger School as the enlisted honor graduate during a ceremony Jan. 27, 2023, at Fort Benning, Georgia.

## Virginia National Guard News Headlines

### Thunder Soldiers honored for federal service in Iraq

Virginia National Guard Soldiers assigned to the Norfolk-based 1st Battalion, 111th Field Artillery Regiment, 116th Infantry Brigade Combat Team, received the Governor's National Service Medal Feb. 25, 2023, to recognize their federal service in Iraq from December 2021 through November 2022.

Read more at <https://ngpa.us/24410>

### Ceremony kicks off Roanoke Regional Readiness Center expansion

The Virginia National Guard broke ground on the expansion of the Roanoke Regional Readiness Center Complex March 2, 2023, in Troutville, Virginia, with military and civilian leaders along with state and local government officials.

Read more at <https://ngpa.us/24407>

### Referral incentives offering promotion, \$1000, and new ribbon

Updates to several referral incentive programs means that right now, enlisting a buddy into the Virginia Army National National Guard could lead to a promotion, a \$1,000 bonus and the new Army Recruiting Ribbon.

Read more at <https://ngpa.us/24408>

### VNG Soldiers conduct infantry exchange in Tajikistan

Three Virginia National Guard Soldiers conducted an advanced infantry tactics exchange Feb. 26 - March 2, 2023, in Dushanbe, Tajikistan, with soldiers and representatives from the Republic of Tajikistan.

Read more at <https://ngpa.us/24411>

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For information about joining the Virginia Army National Guard, the Virginia Air National Guard or Virginia Defense Force, visit the appropriate link below:

### Va. Army National Guard

<http://nationalguard.com/va>

### Va. Air National Guard

<https://go.usa.gov/xGmKG>

### Va. Defense Force

<http://vdf.virginia.gov/joinvdf/>

## Join the Virginia National Guard Alumni Network

<https://go.usa.gov/xzGT3>

# Commonwealth ChalleNGe Class 58 graduates 72 cadets

The Virginia Commonwealth ChalleNGe Youth Academy graduated 72 cadets from Class 58 March 4, 2023, at the Virginia Beach Convention Center in Virginia Beach, Virginia.

Maj. Gen. Timothy P. Williams, the Adjutant General of Virginia, retired Brig. Gen. Walt Mercer, the Department of Military Affairs Chief Operations Officer, and retired Navy Capt. Mark Chicoine, the Commonwealth ChalleNGe director, joined Travis May, the guest speaker for the ceremony, in congratulating the cadets on their accomplishments.

"I'm confident that each one of you will find your path to your own individual success," Chicoine told the graduates.

Commonwealth ChalleNGe is the Virginia component of the National Guard Youth ChalleNGe Program, a 17-and-a-half-month program designed to promote academics, attention to detail, time management, and leadership while promoting self-esteem, confidence and pride.

"It is my honor and my pleasure to stand before you and honor the work of these individuals," May said. "I have had great pleasure to receive motivation from them. I was brought in to motivate them but I found myself being mentored and motivated by the spirit of these children who now are becoming young men and young women."

May served 25 years in prison before receiving a conditional pardon from former Virginia Governor Terry McAuliffe in 2018. He is currently an independent contractor providing fitness training for staff at the Northampton County Jail and serves a peer recovery specialist with "A Chance for a Change."

"I stand before you because I committed myself to my worth," May said. "And the minute I committed myself to my worth, my life reflected that. I honor you today because it took me 25 years to do what y'all did in five and a half months."

In addition to the graduates, May also addressed the families.

"A lot of these young men and women are returning home powerful, new yet vulnerable," he explained. "They need the support of the home. What are you going to bring to the table? Because for five and a half months they have been in a place



**Maj. Gen. Timothy P. Williams, the Adjutant General of Virginia, and retired Brig. Gen. Walt Mercer, the Department of Military Affairs Chief Operations Officer, congratulate graduates of Virginia Commonwealth ChalleNGe Youth Academy Class 58 March 4, 2023, in Virginia Beach, Virginia.**

purifying their minds. Now they're coming back powerful yet vulnerable and they need your support."

"When you leave here today and live your life post ChalleNGe, I offer a couple thoughts," Chicoine said. "You are leaders now, so lead by example. You're the only one who can control your attitude. Be respectful of others. Do the right thing when no one is looking. And give your best effort every day."

"You will always be welcome as alumni," he added. "Go forth and do great things, Class 58."

Read more at <https://ngpa.us/24414>



**A Virginia Commonwealth ChalleNGe Youth Academy Class 58 cadet reunites with loved ones March 4, 2023, in Virginia Beach, Virginia.**

## MORE ON THE WEB

### DMA mentorship program graduates third class

Read more at <https://ngpa.us/24413>

### DPW manufactures "Fort Barfoot" signs

Photos on Flickr at <https://ngpa.us/24391>

### 116th IBCT welcomes new brigade command team

Photos on Flickr at <https://ngpa.us/24353>

### 116th IBCT HQs recognized for federal duty in Kosovo

Photos on Flickr at <https://ngpa.us/24354>

### VDF conducts multi-day unit training assembly

Photos on Flickr at <https://ngpa.us/24412>



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