

529th CSSB validated, ready for mission in Poland

Virginia National Guard Soldiers assigned to the 529th Combat Sustainment Support Battalion have been validated for their upcoming federal mission to Poland after conducting a collective training exercise Feb. 12-16, 2024, at Fort Cavazos, Texas.

“We received some terrific training from our First Army partners to get ready for Poland, and I am excited for the progress and cohesion this team has shown,” said Lt. Col. Carlos Maldonado, commander of the 529th. “The CTE gave us a really good idea of the situations we could see, and everyone performed well. Our Soldiers bring a lot of experience with them from units across the Virginia National Guard, but the exercise was an important to help us improve on working together as a team. We learned a lot and are ready to perform our mission. I am incredibly proud of everyone and their outstanding duty performance.”

During the exercise, 529th Soldiers worked through different potential scenarios simulating the operations they are scheduled to conduct in Poland where they will provide sustainment command and control and support to forward-stationed U.S. and allied forces in the region.

Read more at <https://ngpa.us/28704>



Soldiers assigned to the 529th Combat Sustainment Support Battalion conduct a collective training exercise Feb. 13, 2024, at Fort Cavazos, Texas, to prepare for their upcoming federal active duty deployment to Poland.

Virginia National Guard News Headlines

Army flight school grad follows in father's footsteps

When Warrant Officer Paul D. Kelly graduated flight school Feb. 8, 2024, his silver wings were not the only thing he took away with him. He also had a sense of connection he found among those who knew his late father, Col. Paul M. Kelly, who was killed in action when the warrant officer was only nine years old.

Read more at <https://ngpa.us/28616>

New director of psychological health aims to increase awareness

James O. Parker IV assumed the role of Virginia Army National Guard director of psychological health Feb. 26, 2024. Parker, a licensed clinical social worker, replaces Jonathan Goldwire, who started the behavioral health program in 2018.

Read more at <https://ngpa.us/28705>

229th MPs conduct checkpoint security exchange in Tajikistan

Soldiers with the 229th Military Police Company, 276th Engineer Battalion, 329th Regional Support Group conducted a border checkpoint military security exchange with the Republic of Tajikistan Feb. 19 - 23, 2024, in Dusti, Tajikistan.

Read more at <https://ngpa.us/28707>

New director looks to keep Challenge Youth Academy striving for excellence

Jennifer D. Lanz is the new director of the Commonwealth Challenge Youth Academy and started her new position Feb. 1, 2024. She replaces retired Navy Captain E. Marc Chicoine, who retired Dec. 31, 2023.

Read more at <https://ngpa.us/28706>

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From Marine to Guard, a Red Dragon sniper's journey across continents

Staff Sgt. Joshua Johnson's journey into the military began with a casual invitation from a friend to go "hang out" at the local U.S. Marine Corps recruiting station. His friend had just joined the Marine Corps Reserve and, at 18, Johnson didn't even really know what a Marine was. He'd just graduated high school and said, "I wasn't really doing anything." When the recruiter asked if he wanted to blow stuff up, Johnson said yes, and enlisted as a combat engineer.

Over the next several years, Johnson deployed twice as a Marine. First, in 2010, he went to Afghanistan. There, he was attached to an infantry battalion that focused on "clearing and seizing ground to pave a road for the creation of the Kajaki Dam in the Helmand Province." He enjoyed the experience and said it gave him exposure to what it means to be a "warfighter."

After that deployment, he was asked by his lieutenant to deploy as part of a Marine Air-Ground Task Force, or MAGTF. Initially, he was slated to mobilize to Uganda, but then, when U.S. government facilities were attacked in Benghazi, Libya, his mission changed. As part of a trained and ready force, he and his fellow Marines deployed to Libya. Their job was security and Johnson was pulled to serve as a spotter on a sniper team.

"I don't really know why somebody trusted me with that," Johnson said. "But that got me into the reconnaissance and precision fire aspect."

Johnson came home from Libya in 2013, toward the end of his contract with the Marine Corps Reserve. He considered a few career changes within the service but ultimately got out of the military. Less than six months later, Johnson was back, this time in the National Guard.

"I realized in a short amount of time that I was just not comfortable being a civilian," he admitted. He'd missed the camaraderie he enjoyed while serving and, determined to continue along the lightly-trodden path of a sniper, Johnson sat down for an interview to join the scout platoon at the Lynchburg-based 1st Battalion, 116th Infantry Regiment, 116th Infantry Brigade Combat Team. "I knew I wanted to go to the scout platoon because I wanted to go sniper school after having that exposure to being on the long guns in Libya. The scout platoon was the fast track for that."

Johnson's entry into the scout platoon was unique and conditional. "You don't usually get recruited into the scout platoon, you have to try out for the scout platoon," he explained. Still, he was admitted on a trial basis, assessed in the summer, and was then made a permanent member of the team.

Before he could go to sniper school, Johnson deployed to Qatar with the Bedford-based Alpha Company, 1-116th. He said a good time and that it provided an opportunity for self-development. "A lot of people took up opportunities to go to school, and I took an EMT class that I thought was pretty cool," he said.

After returning from Qatar, Johnson, alongside three other Soldiers from his unit, went to sniper school where all four proved successful.

"It was a great time," Johnson said. "I couldn't ask for a better



Staff Sgt. Joshua Johnson participates in an Emergency Deployment Readiness Exercise to provide security April 22, 2022, at the U.S. Embassy, Mogadishu, Somalia.

time or a better class in sniper school."

Today, Johnson is still serving as the sniper section leader and works full-time as a Virginia State Trooper. Of all the things he's experienced during his time with the National Guard, sharing his knowledge with others has been a highlight.

"I've had a lot of time teaching people in the National Guard," he said. "When you're a scout or you're a sniper, you're also teaching PMI, or Preliminary Marksmanship Instruction, to people. I don't really consider myself to be a teacher, but I do find that I enjoy it."

Read more at <https://ngpa.us/28708>

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