

34th CST travels to Alaska for joint exercise

Virginia National Guard Soldiers and Airmen assigned to the Fort Pickett-based 34th Civil Support Team joined other CSTs and emergency response organizations for Exercise ORCA 25 June 9-13, 2025, in Juneau, Alaska.

The mission of the 34th CST is to support civil authorities in a domestic chemical, biological, radiological, nuclear or high-yield explosive incident, and the evaluated tasks included deploying the team, establishing communications and medical support, conducting survey, technical decontamination and analytical functions as well as conducting interagency coordination.

Exercise ORCA is a full-scale all-hazards chemical, biological, radiological, nuclear and explosives joint and interagency training exercise testing and evaluating the operational capability of the whole-of-government emergency management system, according to a release from the Alaska National Guard.

In addition to the 34th CST, Alaska's 103rd CST, California's 9th CST, Montana's 83rd CST and Oregon's 102nd CST also participated in the exercise, along with other federal, state and local agencies.

~ Read more at <https://vngpao.info/5n8yktm2>



Tech. Sgt. Taylor Lincoln, a Virginia National Guard Airmen assigned to the 34th Civil Support Team, examines a simulated weapons of mass destruction chemical lab during Exercise ORCA June 9, 2025, in Juneau, Alaska.

Virginia National Guard News Headlines

DMA state employees honored at SMR

Retired Col. Everton E. Nevers, the Virginia Department of Military Affairs Chief of Staff, and Lt. Col. Emily Huffman, the State Military Reservation commander, recognized DMA state employees during a luncheon June 16, 2025, at the State Military Reservation in Virginia Beach, Virginia.

~ Read more at <https://vngpao.info/2p89yd38>

29th ID participates in Finland's Exercise Karelian Sword

Approximately 20 Virginia National Guard Soldiers assigned to the 29th Infantry Division participated in exercise Karelian Sword, a large-scale, multi-national military exercise, May 23 - 30, 2025, in the Kymenlaakso region of Finland.

~ Read more at <https://vngpao.info/yc34vp69>

VNG conducts military decision making process exchange in Tajikistan

Five Virginia National Guard Soldiers conducted a staff officer exchange with members of the Tajikistan Armed Forces June 9 - 13, 2025, in Dushanbe, Tajikistan, focused on developing and refining military decision making process practices.

~ Read more at <https://vngpao.info/yckwrwzb>

VNG chaplain leadership recognizes VDF chaplains for their support

Senior Virginia Army National Guard chaplains presented certificates of appreciation and state chaplain coins to six members of the Virginia Defense Force Chaplain Corps June 7, 2025, at Waller Depot in Richmond, Virginia.

~ Read more at <https://vngpao.info/mse5phc3>

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Commonwealth ChalleNGe graduates 30 cadets from Class 62

Commonwealth ChalleNGe Youth Academy graduated 30 cadets from Class 62 June 14, 2025, at Green Run High School in Virginia Beach, Virginia.

Col. Jeff Wagstaff, Senior Army Advisor to the Virginia Army National Guard, retired Col. Everton Nevers, the Virginia Department of Military Affairs Chief of Staff, Jen Lanz, director of Commonwealth ChalleNGe, and Jerome Ferrette, the Commonwealth ChalleNGe deputy director, congratulated each of the graduates on completing the five-and-a-half month long residential portion of the program.

"As I stand here today, I am filled with a sense of pride and admiration for each one of you," Wagstaff told the cadets. "You have embarked on a remarkable journey full of challenges and triumphs and today you stand ready to take the next step into your future."

"This is not the end of the cadets' journey," Lanz said. "It's a launching point. We ask you to carry what you learned here and demonstrate it in the world. Be the leader in your family, in your school in your workplace. Do not forget that you've already accomplished something very extraordinary."

Lanz explained the cadets earned a lot more than just a certificate.

"They earned confidence, self-respect and a purpose," she explained. "You've shown us that growth is not just possible, it's very powerful."

"Today we gather here to celebrate a significant milestone in your lives," Wagstaff said. "A moment where hard work, resilience and determination converged to bring about new beginnings. Each of you have walked a unique journey and today as you stand on the threshold of the next chapter, I want to take a moment to recognize some of the vital supporters who have made this moment possible."

They both also thanked families and friends for their support of the cadets.

"Thank you again to our supporters and also the families that have been a huge support system to these cadets while they've been away from home," Lanz said. "We could not do it without that partnership."

"Your unwavering support has fueled their resilience," Wagstaff explained. "Today as they graduate, know that your love and belief in them have played a pivotal role in their achievements."

"Today we're honored to reintroduce you to your cadet," Lanz told the families. "Not just as the person they were but the leader they've become - as someone who knows how to face challenges, take responsibility and strive for something greater."

"Congratulations graduates," she said. "We're very proud of you and we believe in your future."

U.S. Fleet Forces Band Brass Quintet provided music for the ceremony.

Commonwealth ChalleNGe Youth Academy is the Virginia component of the National Guard Youth ChalleNGe Program and is based at the State Military Reservation in Virginia Beach. ChalleNGe is a 17-and-a-half-month program that is structured in a military-style environment designed to promote academics,



Thirty cadets graduate from Class 62 of the Commonwealth ChalleNGe Youth Academy June 14, 2025, at Green Run High School in Virginia Beach, Virginia.

attention to detail, time management, and leadership, while promoting self-esteem, confidence and pride.

ChalleNGe is divided into three phases. The first phase is the Acclimation Period. This period is the first two weeks of the residential phase and consists of physical, leadership and mental challenges designed to test the candidates' potential for success in the second phase of the program.

The second phase is a 20-week residential period that consists of academics, either high school credit recovery or GED test preparation, post-residential goal development, physical fitness, both individual and group counseling, life skills and team building.

~ Read more at <https://vngpao.info/33nfhnek>

MORE ON THE WEB

116th IBCT welcomes Moore as new commander

~ Photos on Flickr at <https://vngpao.info/bd9pfabf>

Thunder Battalion welcomes new command team

~ Photos on Flickr at <https://vngpao.info/7s7ue9j8>

116th IBCT conducts XCTC rotation

~ Photo collection on Flickr at <https://vngpao.info/2f68jay5>

VNG RRB conducts battalion run during annual conference

~ Photos on Flickr at <https://vngpao.info/2p8rtkbe>

VNG RRB conducts annual conference at SMR

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