

# Crocker succeeds Huffman as SMR commander

Lt. Col. John R. Crocker succeeded Lt. Col. Emily Huffman as the commander of the Virginia National Guard’s State Military Reservation in Virginia Beach, Virginia, during a ceremony Dec. 5, 2025. Col. Eric Quinn, Maneuver Training Center Fort Pickett garrison commander, presided over the change of command ceremony and the exchange of organizational colors signifying the transfer of command from Huffman to Crocker.

“Thanks to Lt. Col. Huffman for her tireless work and effort she invested here,” Crocker said. “To the staff, I look forward to the work we’ll be doing to maintain the installation so it remains a value-added facility for supporting relevant, realistic training in the ever-changing and increasing complex Virginia National Guard.

“I’m also looking forward to maintaining the effective relationships with community partners,” Crocker added. “There are a lot of different groups involved here at SMR across multiple components and multiple state agencies, as well as local organizations.”

Crocker also thanked his family for their support, as well as the VNG leadership for the opportunity to take command of SMR.

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



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**Virginia National Guard News Headlines**

**Senior leaders recognize DMA state employees during luncheon**

Brig. Gen. Todd H. Hubbard, the Virginia National Guard Director of the Joint Staff, and Col. Eric L. Quinn, Maneuver Training Center Fort Pickett garrison commander, recognized and thanked Department of Military Affairs employees during an employee appreciation luncheon Dec. 16, 2025, at Fort Pickett, Virginia.

~ Read more at <https://vngpao.info/2p86bmyz>

**Senior enlisted leader assignments announced**

New senior noncommissioned officers are taking responsibility at the 116th Mobile Brigade Combat Team, 183rd Regiment, Regional Training Institute and the 192nd Wing, as well as multiple Virginia Army National Guard battalions.

~ Read more at <https://vngpao.info/nhbcpb6h>

**STARBASE Blackstone sees success in first year**

As 2025 draws to a close, so does the first calendar year of STARBASE Blackstone, the Virginia National Guard’s second STARBASE Academy location, which opened its doors in summer of 2025.

~ Read more at <https://vngpao.info/2p8du74y>

**Reality Store give ChalleNGe cadets insight into financial decisions**

Cadets of the Commonwealth Challenge Youth Academy experienced an imulation designed to help them gain practical insight into financial decision-making Nov. 15, 2025, at the State Military Reservation in Virginia Beach, Virginia.

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# Six Virginia National Guard Soldiers earn EIB

Six Virginia Army National Guard infantrymen earned the Expert Infantryman Badge after days of rigorous testing that culminated in an Oct. 31, 2025, ceremony at Fort Belvoir, Virginia. The 3rd Infantry Regiment, known as the Old Guard, conducted the testing at Fort A.P. Hill, Virginia.

Four Soldiers — Staff Sgt. Joshua Patton, Staff Sgt. Ivo Garner, Sgt. Carter Cooper and Spc. Javan Cooper — serve with the Staunton-based 116th Mobile Brigade Combat Team, while two — Sgt. 1st Class Jon Valdizan and Staff Sgt. Chad Owen — are assigned to the Fort Pickett-based 183rd Regiment, Regional Training Institute.

First approved in 1943, the EIB serves to “recognize infantrymen who have demonstrated a mastery of critical tasks,” which “build on the foundation of individual proficiency, allowing them to locate, close with and destroy the enemy,” according to the U.S. Army Infantry School.

EIB testing occurs in four phases over five days. Day one includes the Expert Physical Fitness Assessment and day and night land navigation courses. The middle three days focus on weapons, medical and patrol lanes, and on the final day Soldiers complete a 12-mile ruck march.

“The funny thing about EIB is that people tend to fail the events that they were the most comfortable with,” Garner said. “It’s rarely the events that you’re worried about that end up getting you.”

To get a “go” on an event, candidates must complete the task to standard, usually in a specific sequence and often under a strict time limit.

“My biggest worry was breaking sequences from habits built doing things differently for years,” Owen said. Both he and Garner previously attempted to earn the EIB but, like many, fell short. Less than 20 percent of Soldiers who begin EIB testing actually earn the badge.

This time around, Garner trained and tested alongside two Soldiers from his platoon, brothers Carter and Javan Cooper. All three are assigned to the scout platoon within the 116th MBCT’s Lynchburg-based 1st Battalion.

“As a staff sergeant, I felt a strong sense of duty to demonstrate resolve and toughness to my Soldiers so that when they were feeling weak or discouraged, they could at least look to me for strength,” Garner said, adding that, in the end, “I felt that I was actually looking to them for motivation.”

Throughout the testing and training process, the three worked together to encourage, support and motivate one another.

“The EIB is tested individually, but you prepare and earn it with the people around you,” Carter said, noting that all three brought different strengths. “Some of us understood certain lanes better than others, which helped us teach each other and practice rep after rep.”

Carter’s brother, Javan, was the least experienced of the trio, and said the patrol lanes were the ones he focused on the most during train-up.



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“I had never done a call for fire lane or a spot report lane before, especially for time,” he said. To prepare, he studied and ensured he was physically fit enough to exceed the standard, but noted that the EIB is difficult to train for. “The best way to prepare for the EIB is to take all the advice and teachings from your graders on the practice days. They will teach you what you need to know for when test day comes, and if you practice what they teach you, you will succeed.”

The 183rd RTI Soldiers, Owen and Valdizan, teamed up with several peers from the Old Guard. Owen said they trained on everything together and stuck to small groups of two to three.

~ Read more at <https://vngpao.info/3uztmkct>

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