

VNG adapts to support changing statewide COVID response

Approximately 120 Soldiers and Airmen assigned to the Virginia National Guard's COVID-19 testing task force are continuing operations in support of the Virginia Department of Health and the Virginia Department of Emergency Management, even as their mission evolves to include support to vaccination clinics run by local health departments across the Commonwealth of Virginia.

Beginning in mid-January, one of the task force's testing strike teams adjusted their mission for support of point-of-distribution vaccine clinic support at locations across Virginia. Support at these POD sites includes logistics and administrative support, including helping direct patients as they park and navigate the clinics, and assisting with the registration process.

"The vaccination assistance teams are currently working in Roanoke, Charlottesville, and Fredericksburg," said Lt. Col. Heath Phillips, the task force's commander. "To date, those three sites have administered over 25,000 inoculations."

For the Soldiers assigned to support the vaccinations sites, it's an extremely rewarding part of their duty.

Read more: <https://go.usa.gov/xsk2g>



Virginia National Guard Soldiers and Airmen provide logistics and operations support at a COVID-19 vaccine point of distribution hosted by the Blue Ridge Health District Feb. 4, 2021, in Charlottesville, Virginia.

Virginia National Guard News Headlines

329th RSG completes out-processing of troops after D.C. mission

The Virginia-Beach based 329th Regional Support Group can finally take a breath after managing the complete administrative in-processing and out-processing of over 2,500 Virginia National Guard Soldiers supporting law enforcement in Washington D.C. from Jan. 8 to Feb. 12, 2021.

Read more: <https://go.usa.gov/xsk6f>

ChalleNge cadets excel, set to graduate during COVID-adjusted class

Class 54 of the Virginia Commonwealth ChalleNge Youth Academy is scheduled to graduate March 20, 2021, and it will be the culmination of a five-month class that was both virtual and in-person.

Read more: <https://go.usa.gov/xskTX>

Financial counseling offered to Soldiers returning from D.C. mission

Soldiers returning from duty in Washington, D.C. got the opportunity to visit with Virginia National Guard Family Programs representatives, including personal financial counselors to help personnel maintain financial health and readiness.

Read more: <https://go.usa.gov/xskTy>

Cyber intelligence Airman draws inspiration from role models

After enlisting in the Air Force Reserve in 2007 and serving more than a decade in the intelligence field, Master Sgt. Anthony Jones decided to make the jump to the Virginia Air National Guard to pursue a new challenge: cyber intelligence.

Read more: <https://go.usa.gov/xskTA>

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Retention team finds success as Soldiers return from D.C.

When Soldiers returned to Virginia after supporting law enforcement in Washington, D.C., they were met by a bustling operation at Fort Pickett. This was the final phase of their mission, the part that made sure their orders were processed, their travel vouchers filed. Among the many stations set up there, was one for retention. Thanks to the efforts of the Virginia National Guard's retention team, a total of 106 Soldiers successfully extended their enlistments.

"We spoke to every Soldier that came back from the D.C. mission and determined their eligibility to extend," explained Master Sgt. Paul Johnson, the noncommissioned officer-in-charge of operations for the Virginia National Guard's Recruiting and Retention Battalion. He said the retention team, headed by Sgt. 1st Class Madrice Hamn, talked with everyone, but they specifically targeted Soldiers within 450 days of their Expiration Term of Service, or ETS, and had more "in-depth" conversations with them about the future of their Guard careers.

Beyond just talking about extensions, the team also tackled incentive issues as well.

"We fixed bonus issues and provided retention information for not only the Soldiers, but also for many of the command elements," Hamn explained.

Both Johnson and Hamn credited the success of the retention team with getting back-to-basics with old-fashioned Soldier care.

"They were not treated like a herd of cattle just getting pushed through the line," Johnson said. "We took the time to answer every question and address every concern they had whether it took 30 seconds or three hours."

Commenting on the team's success, Maj. Scott Nivens, commander of the Virginia National Guard's Recruiting and Retention Battalion, said, "It just goes to show you getting face time with Soldiers can make a huge difference."

The team didn't just help enlisted Soldiers, Hamn said. They also worked with officers on retention as well.

"I watched NCOs continually offer advice to captains and majors that didn't even know about an officer retention bonus," Johnson explained. "Several of them walked away with \$20,000 and extension paperwork in their hands."

Additionally, the recruiting team set up a refreshment station for the returning Soldiers and also used the opportunity to identify Soldiers interested in joining the recruiting force, coming up with around 25 names of interested Soldiers.

"In my experience as a human, most everyone wants to feel appreciated and needed," Johnson said. "These Soldiers definitely deserve that attention and will receive it."

For those thinking about extending, Hamn recommends doing some research to try to understand what options might be available to them and to reach out to the state retention team with questions or additional guidance. He also recommends Soldiers talk to their significant others or families about the decision.

Johnson agreed and said that while incentives are great, Soldiers should also look to the National Guard for "a second



Virginia National Guard Soldiers assigned to the Recruiting and Retention Battalion talk to Soldiers about retention as they out-process following their support to law enforcement in Washington, D.C., Jan. 25, 2021, at Fort Pickett, Virginia.

retirement that will pay you for the rest of your life once you retire." He also recommended Soldiers use the benefits available to them to help build their careers in the civilian sector.

Ultimately, Hamn credits his team's success with teamwork.

"Teamwork made this dream a success," he said. "Having subject matter experts who love their jobs and who put Soldier care above all other things."

The Virginia Army National Guard is currently offering bonuses for eligible Soldiers who extend their enlistments. Both enlisted Soldiers and officers may be eligible and should reach out their unit for more information.

Read more: <https://go.usa.gov/xsk2h>

MORE ON THE WEB

VNG COVID-19 Vaccination Resource Page

<https://va.ng.mil/COVID-19/Vaccine/>

HR specialist talks career, future plans and inclusion

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

Soldier supporting COVID fight joined to help community

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

Recruiter talks importance of recognizing Black leaders

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

Photos: AG recognizes IT professionals for inspection success

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