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Astphan takes command of 329th Regional Support Group

Col. Alyssa Y. Astphan took command of the Virginia Beach-based 329th Regional Support Group from Col. Juanita Rohler during a ceremony held April 19, 2026, at Fort Pickett, Virginia. Brig. Gen. Charles B. Martin Jr., the Virginia Army National Guard's Land Component Commander, presided over the ceremony and exchange of unit colors that signified the transfer of command from Rohler to Astphan.

"Col. Rohler and Col. Astphan represent decades of combined knowledge and experience, and I'm grateful for each of you for your faithful and dedicated service to the Virginia Army National Guard," Martin said during his remarks, noting that only six officers in the entire organization serve at that level. Martin also noted that during Rohler's time in command, multiple units mobilized, deployed and redeployed, "supporting units across multiple theaters."

Standards for training, retention and strength were all exceeded, Martin said, adding that the unit has a current retention rate of 83% and a strength of 1,700 Soldiers, exceeding the 1,587 requirement.

"Thank you for your extraordinary efforts," Martin said to Rohler. "You've contributed in so many ways to the success of this institution and the Virginia Army National Guard." Martin then commended Astphan on her "tremendous experience," and on the success she achieved in previously-help command and key staff assignments.

Read more: <https://vngpao.info/2dd6hpkj>



Col. Alyssa Y. Astphan takes command of the Virginia Army National Guard's Virginia Beach-based 329th Regional Support Group from Col. Juanita F. Rohler April 19, 2026, at Fort Pickett, Virginia. Brig. Gen. Charles B. Martin Jr., VaARNG commander, presided over the ceremony.



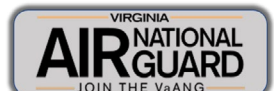
Command post exercise preps 29ID for Warfighter

Photos: <https://vngpao.info/yckntmkt>

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116th MBCT trains on new tech during live-fire exercise

After the Virginia National Guard's Staunton-based 116th Infantry Brigade Combat Team was re-classified as a Mobile Brigade Combat Team in 2025, the unit's new Multi-function Reconnaissance Company has been busy fielding and training on new equipment as part of the Army's Transformation in Contact 2.0 initiative.

Incorporating unmanned aerial systems and electronic warfare capabilities, the MFRC has led the way for the 116th's transformation, increasing the unit's readiness for new missions on a modern and changing battlefield.

As the first National Guard infantry combat team to transition to a MBCT, the 116th's Soldiers are at the tip of the spear in incorporating these new reconnaissance and engagement technologies.

Maj. Gen. James W. Ring, the Adjutant General of Virginia, and Brig. Gen. Rusty McGuire, the Assistant Adjutant General - Army Strategic Initiatives, saw some of the unit's new capabilities put into practice during a multi-domain live-fire exercise April 18, 2026, at Fort Pickett, Virginia.

During the exercise, the MFRC's reconnaissance teams tackled the Automated Infantry Squad Battle Course, incorporating new tactical unmanned aerial systems, counter-UAS capabilities and electronic warfare technology to hinder and defeat a notional enemy.

"The Army's selection of the 116th as one of the first National Guard brigades to transition to the MBCT reflects the professionalism of our soldiers and their ability to lead in testing and implementing new technologies, supported by a strong network of innovation partners across the Commonwealth," said Ring.

The MFRC has spent months fielding and training on new equipment, and the live-fire exercise finally gave them a chance to put their new tools to work.

Read more: <https://vngpao.info/yc6u35jk>

Virginia National Guard Headlines

New Soldiers, ISTs attend VNG First Formation

After nearly seven months of implementation, the Virginia Army National Guard's First Formation program has welcomed hundreds of Soldiers into the force, providing a structured introduction for those newly assigned or recently transferred into the organization.

Read more: <https://vngpao.info/ycckxvuk>

34th CERFP S&E Soldiers earn extraction tab

VNG Soldiers assigned to the Richmond-based 34th CERFP's Search and Extraction element earned their "Extractor Tab" after passing a 12-day search and extraction course March 15, 2026.

Read more: <https://vngpao.info/7b2882ry>

VNG youth kick off Month of the Military Child

April is Month of the Military Child and the Virginia National Guard Child & Youth Program kicked off the celebration with an event March 28- 29, 2026, in Virginia Beach, Virginia.

Read more: <https://vngpao.info/2p82at3n>

VaARNG Soldiers vie for Endurance Team spot

A team of Virginia National Guard Soldiers made a strong showing at the All Guard Endurance Team Trials April 11, 2026, at the Army Aviation Support facility in Grand Island, Nebraska.

Read more: <https://vngpao.info/397dzvfr>



PROMOTED: Chief Warrant Officer 4 Douglas L. Harris, the Virginia Army National Guard's command chief warrant officer, is promoted to chief warrant officer 5 April 10, 2026, at the Virginia National Guard Sgt. Bob Slaughter Headquarters at Defense Supply Center Richmond, Virginia. **More photos:** <https://vngpao.info/2zdkprbe>

RAPTORS & LIGHTNING:

VaANG Airmen bridge gap between F-22, F-35



In the high-stakes world of fifth-generation warfare, the difference between a mission's success and failure often comes down to how quickly a jet can get back in the air. For the Airmen of the 192nd Wing, Virginia Air National Guard, stationed at Joint Base Langley-Eustis in Hampton, Virginia, that means being ready for anything—even if the jet in front of them isn't the F-22 Raptor they're used to.

The VaANG's ongoing partnership with Vermont's 158th Fighter Wing highlights a commitment to developing cross-airframe, multi-capable Airmen and fosters a shared pride in joint efforts.

The goal is to ensure that, whether teams are at a home station or a remote contingency location, a VaANG maintainer can recover, refuel, service, rearm and relaunch VTANG's F-35 just as easily as their own Raptors—and vice versa. This interoperability enhances operational readiness for future joint missions and gives teams an opportunity to develop tactics, techniques and procedures for operating in a contested environment.

"I can't think of two more experienced or better-prepared units than the 158th and 192nd Wings," said Col. Timothy M. Strouse, 192nd Maintenance Group commander. "Leveraging our combined fifth-generation experience allows us to take the best practices from each airframe to prepare for contested operations."

During the initial phase of this partnership in Burlington, Vermont, 192nd Wing Airmen spent four days immersed in F-35 operations. Tactical aircraft mechanics, aircraft armament systems specialists, aircraft ground equipment personnel and low-observable structures personnel trained on various tasks.

The training included launch, recovery and thru-flight operations along with specialized hydraulics and engine oil servicing. Maintenance crews practiced "hot-pit" refueling and performed preflight checks and "safe for maintenance" actions. Weapons teams earned initial certifications for loading various air-to-air missiles, precision-guided bombs, and 25mm gun systems, as well as installing racks and countermeasures.

"The biggest difference between the F-22 and the F-35 would be the loading device that the checklist is on," said Master Sgt. Pernel Davis, 192nd Aircraft Maintenance Squadron aircraft armament technician. "The checklist for the F-35 is more user-friendly than the one for the F-22. However, how you document your work is easier on the F-22."

Master Sgt. Shawn Phillips, 192nd AMXS tactical aircraft maintenance section chief, noted that the two units integrated seamlessly, even identifying shared equipment, such as oil hookups, which would be critical during a joint deployment, improving future operational synergy.

"Teamwork. Working together, we can accomplish anything," Phillips said.

The impact of this partnership extends far beyond the flight lines of Virginia and Vermont. As the Virginia National Guard continues its State Partnership Program with Finland, understanding the F-35 is crucial. With the Finnish Air Force transitioning to the F-35, the VaANG is better equipped to work with NATO allies in cold-weather conditions and share TTPs with FINAF partners during joint flying operations in Finland.

As the VaANG continues to evolve for future combat scenarios, the lesson from the time in Vermont remains the standard.

"Be open-minded and stay flexible," Davis said.



Read more:

<https://vngpao.info/2p8wfd7c>

More on the Web:

VNG recruiters support VSU Trojan Trials

Recruiters assigned to the VaARNG Recruiting and Retention Battalion supported Virginia State University's Trojan Trials April 21, 2026, in Ettrick, Virginia.

Photos: <https://vngpao.info/ycxmunad>

VNG leaders send off 203rd RED HORSE

Maj. Gen. James W. Ring, the Adjutant General of Virginia, and Chief Master Sergeant John F. Nye, the VNG Senior Enlisted Leader, addressed Airmen assigned to the 203rd RED HORSE. 192nd Wing, April 13, 2026, in Virginia Beach, Virginia, as they prepare to mobilize overseas.

Photos: <https://vngpao.info/3jdkp7em>

Virginia Defense Force celebrates birthday

The Virginia Defense Force, commanded by Brig. Gen. (Va.) Richard Diddams, celebrated its 42nd birthday as the all-volunteer reserve to the Virginia National Guard April 18, 2026.

VDF Website: <https://vdf.virginia.gov/>

Awards event celebrates VaANG successes

The 192nd Wing, Virginia Air National Guard, celebrated the dedication and achievements of its Airmen during the 2026 VaANG Annual Awards Ceremony Feb. 21, 2026.

Read more: <https://vngpao.info/58cypysc>

Fort Pickett celebrates Earth Day 2026

Col. Eric L. Quinn, Fort Pickett commander, and other installation employees planted wildflowers and vegetables at the Victory Garden for Earth Day April 22, 2026.

Photos: <https://vngpao.info/9xzb7cn4>

VNG officers participate in Exercise Cold Response in Finland

A team of Virginia National Guard officers traveled to Finland to participate in Exercise Cold Response, a multi-country and multi-service winter exercise lead by the Norwegian Army which concluded March 20, 2026. The VNG's involvement in the exercise was in support of the State Partnership Program, in which Virginia and Finland have been formally connected since 2024.

Four VNG officers participated in the exercise, which brought together more than 25,000 troops from 14 NATO allies. From the Finnish Army headquarters in Mikkeli, Finland, they worked alongside their Finnish counterparts, participating in exercise briefings, planning and sustainment.

While the bulk of the exercise was conducted in Norway, about 7,000 Finnish

forces trained to protect the northern and eastern flank of the country.

Col. James C. Shaver Jr., the Virginia Army National Guard's G1 deputy chief of staff for personnel, shadowed Finnish Col. Mikko Saarelainen, the Finnish Army G7, and participated in meetings such as the Commanders Updated Brief, Battle Update Briefs, Chief of Staff syncs and the Decision Planning Brief.

Lt. Col. Jason Detwiler, the VaARNG's G8, and Maj. Brandon Harding, the Fort Pickett garrison executive officer, were assigned to the Sustainment Cell of Current Operations to work alongside their counterparts on fueling the fight with all classes of supply. They advised during the development of a transportation network map – determining and outlining suitable roads

that could be used to move the force from port or staging area to the forward lines of troops.

Maj. Derrick Hall, executive officer of the 1030th Transportation Battalion, was assigned to the Sustainment Cell of Future Operations. He worked with the Finnish G4 and the Dutch to build comprehensive sustainment plans. Hall fully integrated himself with his team and took the lead in planning the sustainment operation for the exercise.

Together, the team developed operations and fragmentary orders, and gained valuable repetitions in the military decision-making process and rapid decision making process.

Read more:

<https://vngpao.info/5jrdybny>

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