

pūpūkahi

pūpūkahi: "harmoniously united"



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Hawai'i National Guard concludes response to severe weather events



By Rachel Blaire
State of Hawai'i Department of Defense Public Affairs

▶ The Hawai'i National Guard (HING) has concluded a multi-month, statewide response at the end of May after providing extensive support to communities impacted by a series of powerful Kona Low storms and severe weather events in March and April 2026. The complex, multi-island mission, which at its peak

saw as many as 500 Soldiers and Airmen on State Active Duty, transitioned from dramatic life-saving rescues to sustained recovery operations that continued until May 22, 2026.

The response began in mid-March with the first of three storm systems. The HING initially activated about 90 personnel, deploying High Water Vehicle Teams (HWVT) and

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Hawai'i National Guard members removed debris, cleared mud and provided sandbags and potable water to the Waiialua community after the Kona Low storms and severe weather events in March and April. (U.S. Army National Guard photos by Spc. Donald Bond)

pūpūkaʻahi

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HIARNG hosts NGB, Guard leaders on 3-day tour

▶ Hawaii Army National Guard (HIARNG) Aviation hosted senior leaders from the National Guard Bureau and multiple state's National Guards at Army Aviation Support Facility 1, Wheeler Army Airfield on March 27, 2026.

The leadership conducted a three-day tour of multiple facilities within the U.S. Indo-Pacific Command area of operations where they received an orientation flight from HIARNG.

– U.S. Army National Guard photos by Rachel Blaire



Soldiers with the Hawai'i National Guard conduct civil disturbance training at the 29th Readiness Center, Kalaeloa, Hawai'i, in March. The training, where soldiers acted as both protesters and responders, is part of an effort to meet updated federal guidelines for the National Guard Response Force, which focuses on de-escalation, site security and the protection of critical infrastructure. (U.S. Army National Guard photos by Rachel Blaire and retired Master Sgt. Andrew Jackson)



HING modernizes its National Guard Response Force

By Rachel Blaire
State of Hawai'i Department of Defense Public Affairs

▶ The Hawai'i National Guard has conducted training in recent months to meet updated federal guidelines for its National Guard Response Force (NGRF). All 54 states, territories and the District of Columbia are modernizing their NGRFs as well.

The initiative follows a presidential executive order issued last year, and the Department of War guidance directing the National Guard resource, train and organize a more standardized response force by April 1, 2026.

“The NGRF is not a new concept, but what is new, is the level of funding we received to train our service members,” said Maj. William Keahi, Hawai'i National Guard's Reaction Force Trainer.

For more than 20 years, NGRFs have been readily available to governors, Congress and the President to assist during emergencies but have varied in composition, training and equipment readiness across the states. NGRF capabilities include civil disturbance operations, crowd control, area security, critical infrastructure protection and disaster response.

The Hawai'i National Guard serves a dual state and federal mission at the call of the governor and the president. However, the Governor, at his discretion, would call the Hawai'i NGRF into action in response to requests for support from civil authorities.

“The Hawai'i National Guard has a promise to always stand ready to serve the people of Hawai'i and these Soldiers and Airmen are keeping that promise,” said Keahi.

In Hawai'i, the NGRF consists of

over 500 Guardsmen statewide, including mostly Soldiers of the Hawai'i Army National Guard sourced from multiple units and the Security Forces Airmen of the Hawai'i Air National Guard to provide a scalable, joint response. The NGRF Guardsmen can be ready within 24 hours of activation, prepared to respond to Hawai'i's needs, like the activation during the Maui Wildfires in 2023 where they assisted local law enforcement with safeguarding neighborhoods.

The Guardsmen are equipped with personal protective gear and trained with non-lethal equipment. The training focused on de-escalation, site security and the protection of critical infrastructure during domestic operations and natural disaster response. The Hawai'i Air National Guard Security Forces were instrumental in the training of the NGRF, due to their highly specialized skills and experience.

1st Lt. Jerod Zheng, a military intelligence office with D Company, 227th Brigade Engineer Battalion, Hawai'i Army National Guard, talked about the most interesting part of his training.

“It was learning about the tactics that are utilized in order to keep the peace and deescalating a crowd,” said Zheng.

Zheng works for law enforcement in his civilian job and compared the two.

“The training was similar, but there are differences, it was nice to learn about the differences when dealing with crowds,” he said.

Hawai'i's NGRF is not a Quick Reaction Force as some states have been tasked to implement and differs from the executive order's call for a D.C. military police battalion in the nation's capital.

Guardsmen battle for Best Warrior honors

By Staff Sgt. John Schoebel
117th Mobile Public Affairs
Detachment

▶ WAIMĀNALO, Hawaii —
A combination of 11 Soldiers from across the island were pushed to their physical and mental limits during the Hawai'i Army National Guard's 2026 Best Warrior Competition, held March 6 to 8.

The grueling three-day event took place at the 298th Multi-Functional Training Regiment, and Marine Corps Base Hawai'i in Kaneohe. The field consisted of seven junior enlisted Soldiers, two noncommissioned officers and two officers competing for the title in their respective categories.

The winner of this year's Soldier of the Year category was Spc. Brock Lindman, from Alpha Troop, 1st Squadron, 299th Cavalry Regiment. Returning for his second year in a row, Lindman was surprised at the increased level of competition compared to 2025.

"Last year, in the lower enlisted category, everyone was awesome, but a few stood out," Lindman said. "This year, everybody stood out in the lower enlisted category."

In a rare feat of back-to-back dominance, the winner of this year's Non-Commissioned Officer (NCO) of the Year title is a familiar face to the podium, Sgt. Vu Nguyen from the Bravo Troop, 1st Squadron, 299th Cavalry Regiment.

After winning the Soldier of the Year title in 2025, Nguyen was promoted to sergeant later in the year. The rank advancement allowed him to return immediately to the field to test himself against more senior peers.

"I feel honored to be able to come back and be able to compete as an NCO," Nguyen said. "Being able to go back and tell my guys if I can do it, so can you."



U.S. Army National Guard photo by Staff Sgt. John Schoebel



U.S. Army National Guard photo by Spc. Daniel Barcenas

Also returning to the competition for a second year in a row, 1st Lt. Nathaniel Henderson, from Charlie Troop, 1st Squadron, 299th Cavalry Regiment, won the Officer of the Year exhibition category. His victory secured a full sweep of all three categories for the 1-299th CAV in 2026.

"It was more challenging than last year because I thought I'd

walk into it knowing everything, but there were changes; time requirements were reduced, weight requirements were increased, and even the stress shoot was different," said Henderson. "Just because you did it once, doesn't mean you've got it in the bag. You still have to come with that go getter attitude and get after whatever's in front of you."

Above, soldiers competed in the fitness assessment at the Hawai'i Army National Guard (HIARNG) Best Warrior Competition in Waimānalo on March 8. At left, Pfc. Kendall Saxton, a firefighter with the 297th Engineer Detachment, 103rd Troop Command, HIARNG, provided care under fire and moved a casualty during the competition on March 6.

The competition began on a Friday in Waimānalo with an equipment layout, ensuring every competitor possessed the essential gear required based on their packing list. The tempo accelerated quickly with an unknown distance ruck march through the humid terrain of Oahu, followed immediately by night land navigation.

"As soon as I finished my ruck march, I immediately started cramping," said Henderson. "To hear we were about to start the land navigation in 30 minutes, I knew I needed to get something to eat and get some energy in me."



On Saturday, the focus shifted to Marine Corps Base Hawai‘i in Kaneohe. Competitors arrived at the shooting range before sunrise. At first light, they were timed on their technical proficiency of multiple weapon systems, including the M17 pistol, M4 carbine, M249 SAW, and M240L machine gun.

“Definitely do your due diligence and study up,” said Lindman. “My unit put me on orders so I could train up, especially on weapons.”

The weapon system knowledge testing was followed by a high-intensity “stress shoot.” Competitors performed an array of physically demanding exercises and activities in between engaging targets with their weapons.

The day continued into the evening back at the training regiment in Waimānalo with the warrior task assessment lanes, designed similarly to the Expert Soldier Badge. The lanes tested

basic skills including combat life-saving skills, applying camouflage and reacting to contact.

Sunday morning began before dawn with a 30-minute high-intensity circuit workout. Competitors wore full combat uniforms and plate carriers and performed as many rounds as possible, consisting of a 100-meter kettlebell carry, 20 hand-release pushups, 400-meter run, 15 goblet squats, 20 overhead press, 400-meter run (again), 30 kettlebell swings and a 60-second plank hold.

“Last year was pretty tiring, but I felt like this year was a lot more tiring because of the weighted exercises with kettlebells,” said Nguyen. “Last year, it was a lot more body weight, but this time it was more kettlebell and that got me good.”

After the physical portion of the competition, the Soldiers cleaned up and changed into their dress uniforms for a military board.

At top, soldiers competed in the foot march event during the Hawai‘i Army National Guard (HIARNG) Best Warrior Competition in Waimanalo on March 6. Above, winners of the competition flashed shakas with the HIARNG command team. (U.S. Army National Guard photos by Staff Sgt. John Schoebel)

The 11 competitors stood before a panel of senior leaders to be quizzed on military history, regulations and current events.

“The sincerest efforts they put into the physical fitness assessment event made me exceptionally proud,” said Command Sgt. Maj. Roy Yamada, the Command Sergeant Major of the Hawaii Army National Guard. “I could tell they were sore, they were tired, they were just exhausted, but they still did their very best, and they still pushed, even though you knew they had nothing left.”

The event wrapped up with an awards ceremony attended by leadership, friends and family, sending the two main winners to represent Hawai‘i on the regional stage.

The winners of the Soldier and NCO categories earn the honor of representing Hawai‘i at the Region VII competition in New Mexico later this spring.

“I know it’s going to be something to remember, so I’m stoked for that,” said Lindman. “Hopefully I can somehow bring it home for the state of Hawai‘i.”



HIARNG hosts Idaho Army National Guard leadership

▶ Senior leaders from the 1st Battalion, 183rd Aviation Regiment, Idaho Army National Guard, conducted an orientation flight in a UH-60 Black Hawk at Wheeler Army Airfield on March 18. The flight was part of a multi-day visit for the Idaho-based leadership to familiarize themselves with Company C, 1st Battalion, 183rd Aviation Regiment, Hawai'i Army National Guard.

– U.S. Army Guard photos by retired Master Sgt. Andrew Jackson

Counterdrug program engages Hawai'i students

By Ruben Duldulao

State of Hawai'i Department
of Defense Public Affairs

▶ The Hawai'i National Guard Counterdrug Support Program (HING-CDP) conducted a series of student outreach events across multiple schools, reinforcing drug prevention, resilience and healthy decision-making among youth.

At Honowai Elementary School, 82 fifth-grade students graduated from the Drug Abuse Resistance Education (D.A.R.E.) program following a 10-week curriculum focused on building skills to resist peer pressure and make safe, responsible choices. The April 1 graduation ceremony recognized student achievement through certificate presentations, essay readings and awards for outstanding participants.

Students also took a pledge to remain drug-free, while faculty, law enforcement personnel and program representatives attended in support. The event included static displays of military and police vehicles, providing students with an opportunity to engage with service members and the Honolulu Police Department.

The HING-CDP says student outreach is a fundamental pillar of the program's mission, particularly through its demand reduction outreach efforts.

“By engaging directly with students, we provide the mentorship and education necessary to empower Hawaii's youth to make healthy, substance-free choices,” says the HING-CDP. “This proactive approach focuses on prevention, building resilience and leadership skills before high-risk behaviors can take root.”

The HING-CDP has been a dedicated partner in these initiatives for decades, maintaining a steady presence in local outreach since the 1980s. Over the years, its involvement has grown from



Above, Staff Sgt. Brandon Corales of the Hawai'i National Guard Counterdrug Support Program (HING-CDP) gave students a look at a humvee during the Honowai Elementary School D.A.R.E. graduation on April 1, 2026. At left, Staff Sgt. Norvin Gulmayo, Recruiting and Retention, left, joined Sgt. Samson Achuela and Sgt. Arnold Escanom, HING-CDP, at Iroquois Point Elementary School during “Purple-Up Day” on April 13, 2026. (Hawai'i National Guard Counterdrug Program photos)

simple presentations into comprehensive partnerships with schools and local organizations.

“We are looking toward establishing sustained, year-round partnerships with elementary and middle schools rather than relying on isolated events,” says the HING-CDP. “This shift will allow us to provide more consistent support alongside our interagency partners and move toward a more holistic prevention model.”

In recognition of the Month of the Military Child, the HING-CDP participated in a Purple Up Day event at Iroquois Point Elementary School on April 13, 2026. The event honored military-connected students and highlighted the unique challenges they face, including frequent relocations and family separations.

Through classroom discussions and interactive activities, the HING-CDP introduced stress management techniques and emphasized the importance of healthy habits such as proper sleep, balanced nutrition, and physical activity.

“The most impactful takeaway for our team is the reminder that even small moments of mentorship can leave a lasting impression on a child's development,” says the HING-CDP. Engaging with the students at Iroquois Point reinforced the importance of providing a supportive environment where they feel heard and empowered.

Additionally, the program supported student engagement at the Dole Middle School College and Career Fair on March 31, where

personnel hosted an informational booth focused on promoting substance-free lifestyles and positive peer influence. Students interacted with service members to learn about career opportunities within the Hawai'i Army and Air National Guard, while also receiving educational materials designed to reinforce healthy decision-making and long-term goal setting.

Collectively, these outreach efforts demonstrate the HING-CDP's continued commitment to youth development, prevention education and community partnership across Hawaii's schools.

“Strengthening these community bonds fosters a safer environment and ensures the next generation is equipped to lead successful lives,” says the HING-CDP.

Hawaiian Raptors enhance interoperability during Cope Thunder 26-1 in Philippines

By Senior Master Sgt.
Mysti Bicoy
154th Wing,
Hawai'i Air National Guard

▶ CLARK AIR BASE, Philippines — For more than 90 Airmen from the 199th Air Expeditionary Squadron, Exercise Cope Thunder 26-1, conducted April 6 to 17, was more than just another deployment, it was an opportunity to strengthen a long-standing partnership while working side by side with Philippine Air Force counterparts in an environment that demanded trust, adaptability and teamwork.

Representing a mix of active-duty and Air National Guard personnel from Joint Base Pearl Harbor-Hickam, the team, known as the “Hawaiian Raptors,” brought fifth-generation F-22 Raptor airpower to the exercise, flying alongside Philippine FA-50PH fighter aircraft.

Over the course of the exercise, the squadron flew more than 30 sorties as part of a combined force of over 2,800 U.S. and Philippine personnel. But the impact of Cope Thunder went far beyond time in the air.

From the moment Airmen arrived, to their final flight, the work extended into planning rooms, maintenance areas and conversations on the flight line, where relationships were built and lessons were shared in real time.

“For the Hawai'i Air National Guard, this partnership is especially meaningful. We just celebrated 25 years as state partners with the Philippines and look forward to the next 25 and beyond,” said Hawai'i Deputy Adjutant General and Hawai'i Air National Guard Commander Brig. Gen. Phillip L. Mallory. “This is



Philippine Air Force 5th Fighter Wing pilots welcomed U.S. Air Force and Air National Guard pilots assigned to the 199th Air Expeditionary Squadron after their arrival at Exercise Cope Thunder 26-1 at Basa Air Base, Philippines on April 3, 2026. At left, Philippine Secretary of National Defense Gilberto C. Teodoro Jr., left, greeted Hawai'i Air National Guard commander Brig. Gen. Phillip L. Mallory during operations. (U.S. Air National Guard photos by Senior Master Sgt. Mysti Bicoy)

the third time in recent years that Hawaii-based F-22 Raptors have deployed to the Philippines, and each time we continue to grow stronger together.”

Originally established in the Philippines in 1976, Cope Thunder has grown into a cornerstone bilateral exercise. Today, it reflects not only the demands of modern air warfare, but also the importance of working seamlessly with partner

nations in complex environments.

That cooperation was evident throughout the mission, including across several subject matter expert exchanges. Through a maintenance-focused exchange, maintainers from both nations shared techniques, compared troubleshooting approaches and gained insight into how each generates aircraft across different platforms and processes.

“Working alongside our Philippine counterparts, we were able to share techniques and really get on the same page, even coming from different aircraft and specialties,” said U.S. Air Force 1st Lt. Kyle Matern, 199th Air Expeditionary Squadron maintenance officer. “At the end of the day, it comes down to trust, knowing we’ve got each other’s back and we’re all working toward the same mission.”



Behind every sortie was a network of support making it possible to keep aircraft flying. During the exercise, U.S. Army forces established expeditionary fuel systems in austere conditions, ensuring operations could continue without interruption — demonstrating how joint teams extend the reach and endurance of the force.

In the air, that same sense of trust translated into high-intensity training for pilots.

“I had the privilege to fly with our U.S. counterparts, with one of the best fighter squadrons in the world, the Hawaiian Raptors — and wow, that was the hardest one minute, and 30 seconds of basic fighter maneuvers I performed in my life,” said Philippine Air Force Maj. John Red “Period” Honrales.

“It’s always an honor to fly with our U.S. allies,” Honrales added. “Every sortie flown together is a reminder that freedom is defended not by one nation alone, but by alliances who stand shoulder to shoulder.”

For many involved, the connection between Hawai‘i and the Philippines added another layer of meaning. The two share a 25-year State Partnership Program relationship built on mutual respect,



cultural ties and a shared commitment to regional stability—creating a foundation that allows teams to integrate quickly and operate effectively together.

At the center of the Hawaiian Raptors’ contribution was the F-22 Raptor. Flying alongside Philippine FA-50s, both forces trained to communicate clearly, adapt quickly and operate as a cohesive team in dynamic scenarios.

“Integrating the Raptor pushes everyone involved and makes us better every time we fly,” said Lt. Col. Curtis “Narco” Yoshimoto, 199th Air Expeditionary Squadron commander. “What matters most in this exercise is mutual respect, collaboration and the col-

lective effort that drives us toward a shared goal. Working through the process, maintaining open communication at every level, and staying flexible is what allows us to come together and deliver. That’s how we build on success — putting in the work together.”

As the exercise ended, leaders emphasized that success wasn’t defined by any single mission or milestone — but by the people behind it.

“To the planners, leaders, subject-matter experts, maintainers, aircrew, ground personnel, security forces, logistics and medical teams and every individual working behind the scenes, your contributions may not always be

A U.S. Air Force F-22 Raptor from the 199th Air Expeditionary Squadron took off for a training sortie during Exercise Cope Thunder 26-1 at Basa Air Base, Philippines, on April 15, 2026. A U.S. Air Force F-22 Raptor pilot, assigned to the 199th Air Expeditionary Squadron, flashed double shakas during the exercise. (U.S. Air National Guard photos by Senior Master Sgt. Mysti Bicoy)

visible, but they are essential,” said Philippine Air Force Brig. Gen. Angelito R. Retuta, wing commander, Tactical Operations Wing Northern Luzon. “Cope Thunder does not succeed because of one group or one leader—it succeeds because of the collective effort of every person.”

“Cope Thunder 26-1 is not just an event,” Retuta added. “It reflects our shared commitment to readiness, interoperability and security. We will continue to build on this as we move forward.”

With more than 2,800 personnel working together, Cope Thunder 26-1 showed that partnerships are built through shared experience, trust and consistent effort, ensuring both nations remain ready to meet future challenges together.

Hawai'i National Guard highlights spouses

By Rachel Blaire

State of Hawai'i Department
of Defense Public Affairs

Behind every uniform is a foundation of unwavering support, resilience and quiet sacrifice. Military Spouse Appreciation Day honors the unsung heroes of our Armed Forces, the spouses who navigate the profound challenges of deployments and the unpredictable demands of military life. Their steadfast dedication not only sustains their families on the home front but directly enables the operational readiness and strength of our national defense. As we recognize their quiet service, we celebrate the vital and enduring role they play within the broader military community.

Within the Hawai'i National Guard, this spirit of enduring commitment is seamlessly captured by four remarkable spouses nominated for recognition this year. Their unwavering dedication stands as a testament to the vital support system behind our Guardsmen. These are their stories.

HAWAI'I AIR NATIONAL GUARD

Chris Wong

Spouse of Senior Master Sgt.
Angela Dela Cruz, 154th Wing

Among this year's nominees is Chris Wong, the dedicated spouse of Senior Master Sgt. Angela Dela Cruz from the 154th Wing.

Senior Master Sgt. Dela Cruz said, "He is my hero not because of one big moment, but because of the countless quiet ways he shows up every single day. From the very beginning, he supported my decision to serve, and together we've grown through this journey navigating military life side by side, even with his own background as a military child. He often knows what I need before I even have to say it.



Senior Master Sgt. Angela Dela Cruz and her husband, Chris Wong, with their two children. (Courtesy photo)



Maj. Aris Banaag and his wife, Sharon Banaag, center, with their family. (Courtesy photo)

Through Basic Military Training, tech school, deployments, temporary duty, drill weekends, late nights and everything in between, he has been my steady constant whether that meant stepping in to handle life at home or simply being there to listen.

Now, with two little ones, he continues to hold down the home front, managing school, appointments and sports with patience and love. Our kids follow his example, showing up to events to help set up, pitch in where they can and bring the kind energy

that keeps us all grounded and smiling.

In this season of increased responsibility, they all stand beside me, supporting in every way possible. I am beyond grateful for his unwavering support, selflessness and the quiet sacrifices he makes he truly is a Hawai'i Air National Guard spouse hero."

Sharon Banaag

Spouse of Maj. Aris Banaag,
292nd Combat Communications
Squadron

One of this year's nominees is Sharon Banaag, the devoted spouse of Maj. Aris Banaag from the 292nd Combat Communications Squadron.

Maj. Banaag said, "I wanted to nominate my wife Sharon, for all the work she has continuously done to help the 292nd Combat Communications Squadron, as well as all those affected during the past government shut down.

Her commitment to service was most evident in her coordinated efforts with the local food bank.



Maj. Keoki Leong with his wife, Leili'a Leong, and their two children. (Courtesy photo)

As precisely documented in the official Pop-Up Food Distribution Armory Report 2025, the pop-up distributions successfully served 2,346 individuals, including 1,747 new recipients who had not previously required assistance. Her efforts directly supported 779 families, 563 of which were new families. She was part of the 88 volunteers, generating an impressive 440 total volunteer hours.

Sharon has also started a non-profit foundation, Hale Koa O Maui Foundation, that supports military families that are need.”

HAWAII ARMY NATIONAL GUARD

Vicky Cabacongan

Spouse of Command Sgt. Maj. Gary Cabacongan, Recruiting and Retention Battalion

Amid this year’s nominees is Vicky Cabacongan, the committed spouse of Command Sgt. Maj. Gary Cabacongan, from the Recruiting and Retention Battalion.

Command Sgt. Maj. Cabacongan said, “Vicky has been a devoted partner for over a decade, providing steadfast support since 2011. Throughout our journey together, she has made significant sacrifices and shown unwavering dedication, enabling myself to

fulfill my roles and responsibilities effectively. Vicky’s support has been a crucial pillar in my career, contributing to the success and the well-being of our ‘ohana.

In addition to her role as a supportive spouse, Vicky showcases her strong commitment to the military community through her professional position at Navy Federal Credit Union. In this capacity, she engages with service members and their families daily, ensuring they receive the financial assistance and guidance they need.

Vicky consistently demonstrates an exceptional work ethic, dedicating herself to providing high-quality service that exceeds expectations.

Vicky’s genuine passion for helping others is evident in her proactive approach, as she frequently goes the extra mile to advocate for the financial interests of those who serve our country. Through her efforts, Vicky plays an integral role in fostering a supportive environment for military families, reflecting her strong dedication our ohana and the military community as a whole.”

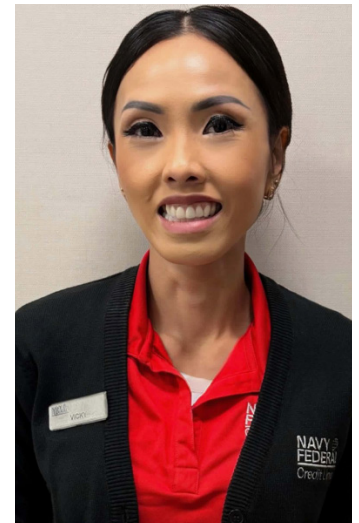
Leili’a Leong

Spouse of Maj. Keoki Leong, 299th Cavalry Regiment, 29th Infantry Brigade Combat Team

This year’s final nominee is Leili’a Leong, the steadfast spouse of Maj. Keoki Leong from the 299th Cavalry Regiment, 29th Infantry Brigade Combat Team. Maj. Leong said,

“The motto Noblesse Oblige — to whom much is given, much is expected — is not merely a family slogan for Leili’a; it is the quiet, steady rhythm of her life. For over twenty-five years, she has been the anchor of our ‘ohana, transforming the daunting challenges of service into a testament of grace and resilience.

While the uniform demands my presence at the frontlines of our Nation and State’s most trying moments, Leili’a provides the calming blanket that makes that service possible. She balances the weight of a demanding career and motherhood with the intricate roles of a military spouse. Whether she is navigating the



Vicky Cabacongan, spouse of Command Sgt. Maj. Gary Cabacongan. (Courtesy photo)

lonely storms of overseas deployments, hosting senior leadership, or leading the Hula Ministry at our church, she leads with a heart centered on service.

More than two decades ago, I prayed for a partner, and God answered with a blessing that exceeds words. Leili’a embodies the strength required to endure sacrifice and the warmth required to keep a family whole. Through every deployment and every exercise, her unwavering love remains our North Star. She proves daily that true nobility isn’t found in status, but in the selfless devotion she offers to her family, her faith, and our community.”

The dedication demonstrated by Chris Wong, Sharon Banaag, Vicky Cabacongan and Leili’a Leong serves as a powerful reminder that the Hawaii’i National Guard’s mission is truly a family endeavor. While we cannot individually recognize every spouse across our organization today, these stories represent the thousands of family members who serve alongside our Guardsmen.

Our readiness is inextricably linked to the resilience of the ‘ohana that sustains our force. The Hawaii’i National Guard honors their collective sacrifice and celebrates the vital, enduring role they play in our mission success.



MILITARY SPOUSE
— APPRECIATION DAY —

HING joins Hawai'i Military Lands Discussion

▶ The Hawai'i National Guard attended the Hawai'i Military Lands Discussion at the Ala Moana Hotel in Honolulu, on March 23. The event brought together 150 participants, including community advocates, military officials and policymakers, to discuss military land use in Hawai'i, with topics ranging from land return and restoration to environmental impacts process.

The all-day event was co-sponsored by the Chamber of Commerce Hawai'i's Military Affairs Council, Hawai'i Island Economic Development Board, Hawai'i Leeward Planning Conference and Hawai'i Island Chamber of Commerce and featured plenary sessions with military and community representatives, geographic breakout discussions focused on areas most directly connected to military installations, and an information exchange with military departments and community organizations.

Deputy Adjutant General Brig. Gen. Phillip L. Mallory spoke at the opening plenary session on the Guard's use of land in Hawai'i, while Maj. Keeki Leong, Hawai'i Island Commander, spoke at the Hawai'i Island breakout discussion.

— U.S. Army National Guard
photos by Rachel Blaire





The Hawai'i Army National Guard (HIARNG) hosted the Army Aviation Association of America (AAAA) Aloha Chapter meeting at Army Aviation Support Facility 1, Wheeler Army Airfield on March 25. This marked the first time the HIARNG hosted, bringing together Army aviators from Active-Duty, National Guard and Reserve components for networking and updates on the organization's initiatives. (U.S. Army National Guard photo by Rachel Blaire)

Hawai'i Army National Guard hosts AAAA Aloha Chapter Meeting for the first time

By Rachel Blaire
State of Hawai'i Department
of Defense Public Affairs

▶ With 82 chapters worldwide and a network of more than 20,000 members the Army Aviation Association of America (AAAA) is a nonprofit dedicated to representing the full spectrum of Army Aviation interests. Members include Active-Duty personnel, Army National Guard and Army Reserve personnel, government civilians, retirees, industry partners and supporters united by their connection to Army Aviation.

One of those AAAA chapters is the Aloha Chapter, which encompasses all 160+ AAAA members in Hawai'i. The

Aloha Chapter meeting was hosted by the Hawai'i Army National Guard for the first time in March. Additionally, the meeting had special guests from National Guard Bureau and several different state's National Guards, who happened to be in Hawai'i at the time.

After attending the Aloha Chapter February meeting, "I had the great idea, to be like hey why don't we in the Guard host it next time around. Especially with the NGB team here, it only makes sense," said Aloha Chapter Member Maj. John Worthington, Hawai'i Army National Guard.

Aloha Chapter Secretary Maj. Manuel Ledezma Vera, U.S. Army ran the meeting provid-

ing updates to members and highlighting several key services provided including scholarships, awards and events.

"We recently got approved by national AAAA to provide our own portion of a scholarship. \$2,000 dollars that is going to be provided for someone from our local chapter," said Ledezma Vera. "We actually have four family members from within our local chapter that did apply."

Membership was highlighted as a key issue. "We continue to grow the team here and different options for us to make the chapter a little bit more active and definitely expand the chapters membership," said Aloha Chapter President retired Col. Brian Watkins.

After the official portion of the meeting moved to the social part, with Army aviators mingling and enjoying a potluck dinner. This occasion to connect was highlighted as a major benefit, "if I had to pick one word for AAAA it's an opportunity to network," said Worthington.

"AAAA creates this opportunity where it's like a big melting pot where both active duty, National Guard and those that are just out there in the aviation community, it's an opportunity to get together, meet each other," said Worthington. "Army aviation is a small world. I've actually met people that I've deployed with, that I haven't seen in a while. It's a good way to link back up with old friends."

Maintenance staff recognized, honored with HIANG coins

By retired Master Sgt.
Darrell Bactad
Headquarters,
Hawai'i Air National Guard

State of Hawai'i Deputy Adjutant General and Hawai'i Air National Guard Commander Brig. Gen. Phillip Mallory and State Command Chief Mey Martin presented their HIANG coins to Harlan Tasaka, Bang Nguyen and Tommy Ah Sam from the State of Hawai'i Department of Defense (HIDOD) Engineering Office's Maintenance Branch for their efforts and dedication to the office of Headquarters, Hawai'i Air National Guard (HQ HI-ANG). "All members of the Hawai'i Department of Defense are crucial in living up to our vision of trusted, ready and responsive. Harlan, Bang and Tommy are tremendous examples of that. Their hard work and professionalism directly contribute to our mission, and we are grateful for their services," said Mallory.

They have always maintained the highest standards in keeping the work areas clean and tidy.

"Having served in the department for many years, they continuously uphold the highest standards, reflecting great credit upon themselves and the organization. Their fun and happy-go-lucky personalities contribute to the aura we get from them," said Renee Mosher Wakumoto, executive secretary to Mallory.

Their positive attitude and unwavering professionalism, make them an integral part of the HIANG's workplace culture.

"I've been at HQ HIANG for three years now, and from day one, these three have been nothing but superb," said Darrell Bactad, HQ HIANG Office Assistant. "Maintaining a clean and sanitary working area contributes to the health, morale and operational readiness for our office. Even our restrooms



U.S. Air National Guard photos by retired Master Sgt. Darrell Bactad



Above, General Maintenance and Services Supervisor Patrick Tangonan, second from left, along with coin recipients Harlan Tasaka, fourth from left, and Bang Nguyen, third from right, pose with Brig. Gen. Phillip Mallory, center, and the Headquarters, Hawai'i Air National Guard crew. At left, Hawai'i Air National Guard State Command Chief Mey Martin presented her Command Chief coin to Bang Nguyen, left, and Tommy Ah Sam.

single day. Whether it is a warm greeting in the morning or a quick smile in the hallway, their personalities transform routine interactions into moments of genuine connection.

"It's a thankless job, and we just wanted to show our appreciation to them. I'm sure everyone in Buildings 306 and 306A feels the same way. Every job is important and we are just thankful for what they do, day in and day out," said Bactad.

Mahalo to Mallory and Martin for taking the time out of their busy schedules to recognize Harlan Tasaka, Bang and Tommy, they deserve it!

outside are offices are immaculate. I think we have the cleanest restrooms in the state!"

They greet staff members with a positive demeanor, treat our workspace with respect and seamlessly integrate their custodial duties around our operational requirements without causing disruption.

During the HIANG's 5-4-9 days off, Nguyen and his crew sweep and mop the entire office area, including the kitchen and vacuum the carpeted areas. When the staff comes back to work the next day, the office is "spick and span."

The three bring an uplifting energy to the work areas every



Civilian employers of HING members board Boss Lift

▶ The Hawai'i Chapter of the Employer Support of the Guard and Reserve (ESGR) recently hosted a Boss Lift in partnership with the Hawai'i Army National Guard (HING). During the Boss Lift 17 civilian managers from 11 companies that employ National Guardsmen or Reservists in Hawaii, got to experience a day in the life of the Soldier or Airmen during an orientation flight on a HING CH-47 helicopter. After the flight a representative from each company signed an ESGR support degree. The companies that participated were, Pearl Harbor Naval Shipyard, Island Jiu Jitsu West, Goldwings Supply Service, Honolulu Fire, Y. Hata, Straub Benioff Medical Center, Honolulu Fire Department, Work for Warriors, Hi Tech Roofing, Campbell High School, Frito Lay and Miracle Man Auto Detailing.

– U.S. Air National Guard photos by retired Master Sgt. Andrew Jackson



Hawai'i Army National Guardsmen receive U.S. Border Patrol Merit Achievement Award

By Rachel Blaire

State of Hawai'i Department of Defense Public Affairs

▶▶ Three Hawai'i Army National Guardsmen were involved in an operation last year to rescue a Border Patrol Agent and his canine from the California mountains after a snake bite. For their efforts they were awarded a U.S. Border Patrol Merit Achievement Award on April 3rd, 2026, which is presented to an individual or a group for lifesavings efforts that exceed expectation.

“It was an honor for the crew to receive this award for the K-9 rescue mission. The team stayed focused, worked together and did what was needed to bring the dog out safely,” said Chief Warrant Officer 4 Jeff Hebert, one of the aircrew members that day.

U.S. Soldiers assigned to Detachment 1, Company A, 3rd Battalion, 140th Aviation Regiment (1/A/3-140th AV), 103rd Troop Command, Hawai'i Army National Guard, deployed to support Task Force Sentinel by providing aviation resources needed to detect and deter illegal activities.

Task Force Sentinel worked closely with the U.S. Northern Command, Department of Homeland Security and National Guard units from Alaska, Arizona, California, Colorado, New Mexico and Nevada.

On May 9, 2025, Hebert and fellow 1/A/3-140th AV aircrew members Chief Warrant Officer 2 Jerome Ledward and Sgt. Mariano Vergado-Duclayan, were working on a California Army Air National Guard Blackhawk helicopter to provide aerial spotting and guidance.



Hawai'i Army National Guardsmen Sgt. Mariano Vergado-Duclayan, second from left, Chief Warrant Officer 4 Jeff Hebert and Chief Warrant Officer 2 Jerome Ledward flashed shakas alongside San Diego Sector Chief Patrol Agent Justin De La Torre, far left, and Border Patrol Agent Benjamin Camacho and his canine, Boo. (U.S. Army National Guard photo by Col. Byron Cadiz)



It was an honor for the crew to receive this award for the K-9 rescue mission. The team stayed focused, worked together and did what was needed to bring the dog out safely.”

Chief Warrant Officer 4 Jeff Hebert
Hawai'i Army National Guard

That afternoon the Blackhawk got the call that Border Patrol Agent Benjamin Camacho's Canine partner, Boo, sustained a rattle-

snake bite in the Otay Mountain Wilderness near San Diego, Calif. The Blackhawk landed to pick

up the canine team and transferred the pair to an Air and Marine Operations' Blackhawk helicopter at John Nichols Field Airport a few miles away. From there, they flew directly to Pet Emergency & Specialty Center in La Mesa, Calif.

Camacho and Boo were whisked into the pet hospital to receive antivenom. The attending veterinarian noted the quick response (less than 30 minutes) had been essential to Boo's survival and eventual full recovery.

Resources that matter: Military and Family Readiness in action

By Rachel Blaire

State of Hawai'i Department of Defense Public Affairs

▶ The Hawai'i National Guard's strength extends beyond its Soldiers and Airmen, it includes the families who support them every step of the way. In a recent episode of the Na Koa Exchange podcast, leaders from the Military and Family Readiness programs shared how they are working to ensure that no member of the Guard community faces challenges alone.



Rod DuPont, State Family Program director, left, Malery DuPont, Hawai'i Air National Guard Military and Family Readiness specialist, and Jeff Hickman, State of Hawai'i Department of Defense Public Affairs director during filming of a Na Koa Exchange podcast episode. (Photo by retired Master Sgt. Andrew Jackson, State of Hawai'i Department of Defense Public Affairs)

Rod DuPont, State Family Program director, and Malery DuPont, Hawai'i Air National Guard Military and Family Readiness specialist, discussed their personal journeys and the mission that drives their work: connecting service members and families to critical resources.

Rod DuPont began with the Hawai'i National Guard Youth ChalleNge Program, then joined the Hawai'i Army National Guard, leading to more than 20 years of service. Malery DuPont's experience in nonprofit organizations and community outreach shaped her passion for helping others.

Together, the DuPonts emphasized the importance of Military

and Family Readiness as a centralized support system for Guard members and their families.

"Military and family readiness is your one-stop shop for resources," said Malery DuPont.

These resources include financial counseling, employment assistance, youth programs, deployment support, and connections to community services. However, one of the greatest challenges remains awareness.

"Sometimes the information doesn't always trickle down to

the family," said Rod DuPont.

To address this, teams actively conduct outreach through unit briefings, newcomer orientations, digital tools and outreach to ensure families know what support is available before, during and after times of need.

The program continues to focus on reducing stigma and making resources easily accessible through initiatives like food pantries, volunteer opportunities and resiliency training.

"We're here to support you with

whatever you need," said Rod DuPont. "Come get resources for you and your family. You don't have to struggle alone."

Military and Family Readiness programs exist to support the total force ensuring that service members and their families are prepared, informed and connected. Through continued outreach and collaboration, the Hawai'i National Guard remains committed to strengthening the community behind the mission.

Watch the podcast:
<https://rb.gy/d257su>



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If you want to be featured in an upcoming issue, send your idea to dod.pao.all@hawaii.gov.

To view past issues, go to: dod.hawaii.gov/blog/category/newsletters/pupukahi

Big wins, tough battles and what it means for HIDOD

By retired Brig. Gen. Neal Mitsuyoshi
State of Hawai'i
Department of Defense

▶ If the legislative session had a theme for the State of Hawai'i Department of Defense (HIDOD) this year, it would probably be: "Steady progress through persistence." From supporting Guard members and military families, to strengthening emergency management capabilities statewide, to helping shape veterans' programs for future generations, the 2026 Legislative Session was another reminder that the work happening at the HIDOD extends far beyond military operations alone.

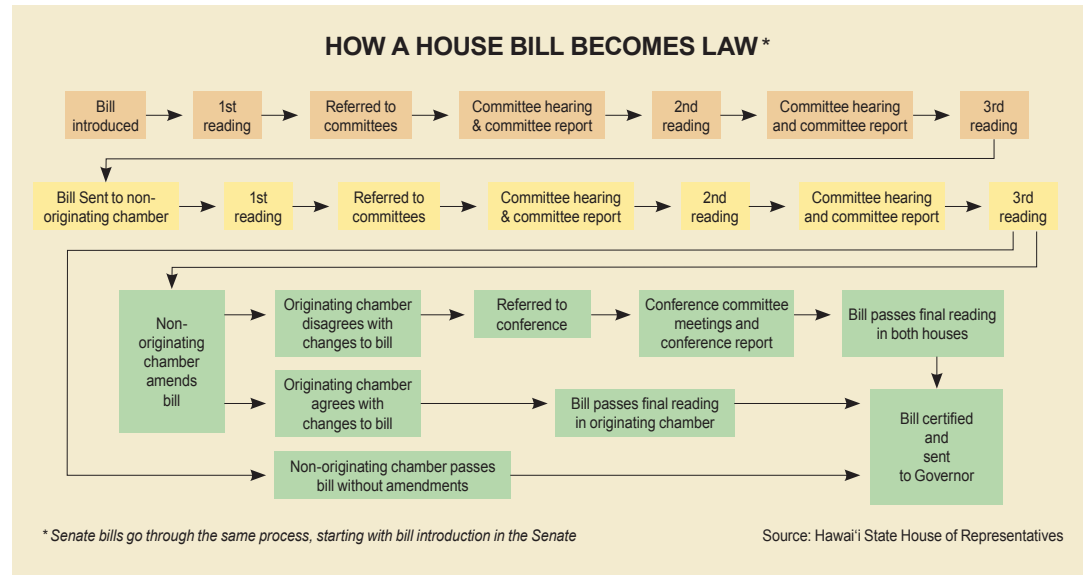
While not every priority bill crossed the finish line, HIDOD secured several meaningful legislative victories that will directly impact our Soldiers, Airmen, employees, veterans, emergency managers and community partners statewide.

Supporting veterans and military families

Several measures impacting the Office of Veterans' Services (OVS) and military families passed this session.

One of the most significant was House Bill 2343, addressing operations for the future Maui State Veterans Home. It removes uncertainty in current Hawai'i Revised Statutes by allowing the O'ahu-based Hawai'i Health Systems Corporation to operate the home if a Maui-affiliated health care entity cannot. This is especially important given the defunct status of the Maui HHSC board and helps maintain momentum on the \$93 million project.

Senate Bill 2614 authorizes the Department of Education to award retroactive high school diplomas to veterans whose education was interrupted by military service in World War II,



the Korean War or the Vietnam War. For many families, this is long overdue recognition of sacrifice and service.

The Legislature adopted Senate Concurrent Resolution 28, which directs the HIDOD to convene a working group to develop recommendations for a future State of Hawai'i Commemorative Vietnam Veterans Medal for Hawai'i residents that served in the Vietnam war. The working group will examine eligibility criteria, medal design, costs and implementation, and provide a report to the Legislature in December 2026.

Strengthening emergency management and community resilience

Hawai'i Emergency Management Agency (HIEMA) also saw several legislative wins this session that will help modernize Hawai'i's emergency management and disaster response capabilities.

House Bill 1752 places the HIEMA administrator on the Emergency Medical Services Advisory Committee, ensuring emergency management perspectives are represented in statewide discussions involving

trauma care, 911 systems, disaster response coordination and emergency medical policy.

House Bill 2498 establishes a Central and Leeward O'ahu Care Home Community Resilience Pilot Program to help eligible care homes improve structural and operational resilience during disasters and emergencies.

House Bill 2443 advances disability integration in emergency management by establishing a Disability Integration Specialist position within HIEMA. The bill focuses on ensuring accessibility, inclusion and equitable disaster planning for individuals with disabilities.

House Bill 2314 modernizes Hawai'i's emergency medical services framework to align with current national best practices. Among other updates, the measure expands community paramedicine programs, authorizes additional telehealth support options and transitions the advisory structure into a broader "Emergency Medical Systems of Care" model.

Meanwhile, Senate Bill 3156 authorizes the Department of Transportation to enter agree-

ments with the U.S. Department of Defense for services at federal military installations which will improve support for emergency evacuation route access through Kolekole Pass from Waianae during emergencies.

Direct benefits for Hawai'i National Guard Members

Several successful bills will directly support Hawai'i National Guard (HING) members and families.

Senate Bill 2138 expands the State Tuition Assistance Program (STAP), allowing qualifying HING members to pursue graduate degrees in addition to undergraduate education. This enhancement creates additional professional development opportunities and supports retention and workforce readiness.

Senate Bill 3118 updates Hawai'i law to align with the Interstate Compact on Educational Opportunity for Military Children, helping military families avoid educational disruptions during relocations and transitions on active duty.

Senate Bill 3082 expands Hawai'i family leave law to include

“qualifying military exigencies,” aligning state law more closely with the federal Family and Medical Leave Act. This will provide additional support for HING families dealing with deployment-related responsibilities such as childcare coordination, counseling appointments, military ceremonies and reintegration activities.

Senate Bill 3083 enhances community safety by requiring civilian courts to notify military authorities within 24 hours when protective orders are issued involving service members.

Bills that fell short, but still matter

As with every legislative session, not every HIDOD priority

measure made it to the governor’s desk. Several priority bills advanced deep into the legislative process before ultimately stalling late in session.

Senate Bill 3110, the HIDOD Civil-Military updates bill, successfully passed five House and Senate committees, but ultimately did not receive a hearing in House Finance.

Senate Bill 3109, the HIEMA Administrator position update, passed all referral committees and advanced to conference committee. Although agreement had been reached on final bill draft language, the measure never received final release from the finance committees before legislative deadlines.

House Bill 2292, relating to HIEMA special project positions, also stalled in House Finance despite early momentum.

Even when bills do not pass, the work invested is rarely lost. Many concepts and policy discussions established this session become the foundation for future legislative success. Because several measures had a level of support and made progress, HIDOD can reintroduce these proposals again next year to further discussion

Looking ahead

All HIDOD related bills that passed the Legislature are currently undergoing final review and recommendation for the governor’s approval. None of the HIDOD-related measures

are recommended for veto and Gov. Josh Green has until June 24, 2026, to sign or veto bills, or they will become law by July 2026.

Final thoughts

Legislative sessions are rarely glamorous. Much of the work happens quietly in hearings, briefings, late-night negotiations, written and in-person testimony, engagements, phone calls and relationship building. But the results matter. The 2026 session demonstrated how legislative work directly shapes the HIDOD’s mission and impact across Hawai’i. While not every priority crossed the finish line this year, HIDOD continues building momentum for the future, one session at a time.

Hawaii National Guard (HING) Joint Staff shares updates

▶ **Mission:** The HING Joint Staff serves as the central operational hub, providing strategic and operational-level command, control, and coordination for all Hawaii National Guard forces. Our primary mission is to ensure seamless joint operations and defense support of civil authorities during state emergencies, while also maintaining federal readiness for national defense requirements.

Readiness: The Joint Staff maintains a constant state of high readiness, postured to rapidly mobilize and integrate with state, federal and partner agencies. Our continuous involvement in real-world crisis response and high-level training exercises ensures we are prepared to face both domestic emergencies and global security challenges at a moment’s notice.

Annual Training accomplishments

This year, our Annual Training centered on the highly integrated Makani Pahili and Homeland Defense Exercise 2026.

During this period, the Joint Staff successfully accomplished the following:

- Validated Emergency Response: Tested and refined our hurricane response and disaster mitigation plans, ensuring synchronized operations with the Hawaii Emergency Management Agency and other interagency partners.
- Command and Control: Strengthened joint operational tracking, logistics coordination and domestic response capabilities, solidifying our ability to protect the homeland and support Hawaii’s communities during major catastrophic events.

Recent Missions or Exercises

Real-World missions: The HING Joint Staff has had a high operational tempo over the past few months, directly supporting Hawaii’s communities through multiple severe environmental crises. We provided critical



coordination and response for:

- February Severe Weather incident

- March Kona Low 1 and Kona Low 2
- April Severe Weather incident

Counterdrug mission: We provide continuous support to law enforcement by leveraging military-unique capabilities to detect, interdict and disrupt illicit drug trafficking. By applying specialized training and resources, we actively assist partner agencies in curtailing the flow and use of illegal substances.

Exercises:

- Makani Pahili/Homeland Defense Exercise 2026
- Keen Edge 2026: We participated in this premier bilateral command post exercise, ensuring integration with our USARPAC partners.
- State Partnership Program: Conducted Key Leader Engagements and functional training

events with Indonesia and the Philippines to strengthen partnerships and support combatant command, U.S. Chief of Mission and Department of War security cooperation goals. These multi-functional, whole-of-society engagements leveraged military, government and social capabilities to deepen bilateral ties and enhance regional stability.

Future exercises or deployments

As we transition out of our recent severe weather response the Joint Staff remains postured for the upcoming Pacific hurricane season. We are also preparing for Makani Pahili 2027 and Vigilant Guard 2027, continuing our focus on disaster response and homeland defense.

New technologies or systems integration

In our continuous effort to modernize and enhance our operational effectiveness, the Joint Staff has recently focused on adopting MAVEN as our common operating tool.

Hawai'i Job Challenge Academy holds final graduation before program ends



▶▶ Nineteen associates graduated from Class 4 of the Hawai'i Job Challenge Academy (JCA) on Friday, May 22, during a ceremony held at the Keaukaha Military Reservation Hilo Gym. This was the last class before the Hawai'i National Guard closes the program at the end of June due to federal budget cuts.

The event honored their hard work, perseverance and commitment to personal and professional growth throughout the past five months. During their time in the program, associates explored a variety of career pathways aligned with their individual goals and interests.

Seven associates completed the construction pathway, while others pursued training in barbering, plumbing, information technology, electrical work, automotive, towing, photography and permanent make-up/body sculpting. All graduates earned their OSHA 10 certification in addition to certifications within their respective career pathways.

Four associates also earned their Hawai'i State High School Equivalency (HiSET) diploma, marking a significant educational achievement during their time in the academy. The ceremony additionally recognized associates and staff members for their leadership, dedication, positive attitude, and outstanding contributions throughout the program.

Congratulations JCA Class 4 graduates!

– Photos by retired Master Sgt. Andrew Jackson, State of Hawai'i Department of Defense Public Affairs



New directors aim to elevate youth program

▶ *The Hawai'i Youth Challenge Academy (YCA) in Kalaeloa welcomed new Director Dr. Pearl Shek and Deputy Director James Logue on March 16. We asked them a few questions.*

Describe your position at YCA.

Pearl Shek: As the Director of the Hawai'i Youth Challenge Academy, my responsibility goes beyond managing daily operations. I serve as a leader and mentor who motivates cadets and staff, fosters accountability, develops and upholds policies and procedures and works to continuously improve and elevate the program for future generations. My goal is to ensure the academy remains a positive, disciplined and transformative environment that prepares young people for success in life.

James Logue: I serve as the Deputy Director. I make it a point to use my position as more of a "facilitator" than a "boss." My job is to ensure that the staff members have the necessary tools, equipment and policies in place to successfully execute their duties and in a streamlined manner.

What did you do before joining YCA?

Shek: Before joining the YCA 'ohana, I served as the executive assistant to the CEO of Kōkua Kalihi Valley Comprehensive Family Services. I first joined Kōkua Kalihi Valley CFS as a temporary project assistant during the COVID-19 pandemic. I was later promoted to full-time public housing coordinator, and three years later, was promoted again to executive assistant to the CEO.

While serving the Kalihi community, I was also a full-time student at University of Phoenix, where I earned my Doctorate in Management. My time at Kōkua Kalihi



Director Dr. Pearl Shek

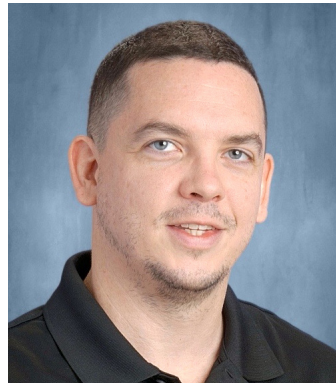
Valley CFS was deeply meaningful, and I truly valued the opportunity to serve my community.

However, after completing my doctorate program in November 2025, I felt called to pursue a long-time goal: helping youth succeed in life in whatever capacity I can. Today, I am proud to be part of the YCA 'ohana, working alongside an amazing team committed to helping every young person who comes through the program reach their fullest potential and achieve goals they may have never believed possible.

Logue: Before joining YCA, I served as a special investigator with the state Department of Human Services, specializing in welfare fraud investigations. Prior to that, I worked as a SNAP case manager, legal assistant, and legislative aide for the state House of Representatives. I am also a combat veteran of Operation Iraqi Freedom and have experience working in various roles within the construction trades.

What are your priorities as you start your YCA career?

Shek: I had only heard about YCA through word of mouth and was told it was simply a boot camp for troubled teenagers. However, during my first two weeks of training, I learned about the true purpose of the program



Deputy Director James Logue
(Photos by Lifetouch)

and the many opportunities it provides for our youth. I was amazed by how extraordinary this program truly is and by the impact it continues to make.

The former directors have done incredible work to sustain and grow this program for more than 30 years. Their dedication has built a strong foundation, and I recognize that I have big shoes to fill as the new director.

My priority as I start my YCA career is to elevate the program to the next level by honoring the foundation that was established, reinforcing the core values and basics that make the program successful, implementing necessary changes, and adapting to the needs of each new generation. Most importantly, my goal is to ensure the continued success and longevity of the program so that future generations of our youth can benefit from the opportunities, structure, and guidance that YCA provides.

Logue: My priorities are to update standard operating procedures, get rid of unnecessary tasks, refocus staff on their specifically assigned duties, try to make the quality of life at the workplace even better.

What do you want the community to know about the program?

Shek: Many people misunder-

stand YCA and assume it is a boot camp for troubled teenagers or a rehabilitation program for recovering youth addicts. That is simply not the case.

Today's generation faces challenges that often make it difficult to succeed in a traditional learning environment. Many young people benefit from structure, discipline, mentorship, and guidance in order to reach their full potential. YCA provides those opportunities in a positive and supportive environment. This does not diminish the hard work and dedication of parents. Instead, the program works alongside families to help motivate youth to become responsible individuals, productive members of the community, and confident leaders. Most importantly, YCA helps young people achieve goals and discover potential they may have never believed possible for themselves.

Logue: The community should know that the program offers a fresh start to those youth who need guidance and purpose. The program offers structure and rids the cadets of outside distractions and allows them to focus so they can graduate. The program also helps cadets find careers before leaving the program. From military service to construction and medical, and other fields.

What is your "go-to" karaoke song (even if you don't sing)?


Shek: My go-to karaoke songs are either "Girls Just Want to Have Fun" by Cyndi Lauper or "I Wanna Dance with Somebody" by Whitney Houston.

What is the most used emoji in your phone's "frequently used" section?

Logue: The most used emoji in my phone's "frequently used" section is definitely the laughing emoji.

Governor's Memorial Day Ceremony



 The State Office of Veterans' Services hosted the Governor's Memorial Day Ceremony on May 25, 2026, at the Hawai'i State Veterans Cemetery in Kāne'ohe. Office of Veterans' Services Director John Alamodin and Hawai'i Adjutant General Maj. Gen. Stephen Logan delivered the opening and welcome remarks, while Gov. Josh Green provided the Memorial Day Address. The ceremony included an opening oli (prayer) by Pualeilani-Paiea Kamahoahoa, a parade of veterans service organizations escorted by the Nā Kula Alaka'i (Youth Challenge Academy) and musical performances by the Hawai'i Army National Guard's 111th Army Band and Jeanne Oliveira. The colors were presented by Joint Service Color Guard and the Ceremonial Royal Guard. There was a CH-47 flyover from the Hawai'i Army National Guard and the laying of state and military wreaths.

— Photos by retired Master Sgt. Andrew Jackson,
State of Hawai'i Department of Defense Public Affairs

Governor's Memorial Day Ceremony





From Page 1

embedding liaisons in county emergency operations centers.

During this first storm, Guard members evacuated 24 civilians from floodwaters on Hawai'i Island, assisted with dam observation on O'ahu and managed traffic control points on Maui.

A week later the mission escalated with the arrival of a second, more powerful Kona Low storm, which increased the number of activated personnel to around 200. This phase was defined by critical rescue operations on O'ahu, where HWVTs conducted ground rescues for 91 people, and UH-60 Black Hawk helicopters airlifted another 47 adults, children and two dogs to safety from the Wai'anae area. The Guard's 93rd Chemical, Biological, Radiological, Nuclear and Explosive Enhanced Response Force Package assisted with search and extraction operations in the first days after the storm on the North Shore of O'ahu.



Above, Hawai'i National Guard members helped fill sandbags alongside community volunteers in Waialua on April 7. At left, Guardsmen loaded flood debris onto vehicles on March 28. (U.S. Army National Guard photos by Spc. Donald Bond)

“Our Soldiers and Airmen answered the call to service, putting community first in support of response and recovery efforts during these back-to-back-to-back storms,” said Maj. Gen. Stephen F. Logan, the adjutant general for the state of Hawai'i. “Their commitment to helping neighbors in need, reflects their dedication to help families and communities begin recovery.”

As the immediate flood threats from the March storms subsided, the mission transitioned to recovery. Guard members assisted Maui County with 68 damage assessments, including an aerial survey of Moloka'i for Maui Mayor Richard Bissen.

On O'ahu, the focus shifted to debris removal and providing essential services. Guard

teams began clearing debris and distributing potable water to communities on the North Shore.

The operational tempo remained high into early April, as Guard members prepared for a third storm system while continuing recovery work. More than 4,400 sandbags were filled and distributed to protect communities, and response assets were staged statewide.



Hawai'i National Guard (HING) soldiers and airmen helped with debris removal on April 1 in Waialua. At left, Spc. Alaricson Afaese helped distribute potable water in Waialua on March 25. (U.S. Army National Guard photos by Spc. Daniel Barcenas)

“Across the state, we’ve called on our citizen soldiers and airmen to be ready to assist first responders and protect our communities,” said Brig. Gen. Tyson Tahara, acting director of the HING Joint Staff, during the April preparations. “We continued to maintain strong coordination with our county emergency management partners to provide disaster relief.”

The final phase of the mission involved continued support for O’ahu residents affected by a boil-water notice in the Waialua area. A team of 130 personnel managed bulk potable water distribution points at Otake and Mill Camps, a mission that continued until demobilization at the end of May.

Meanwhile, support on Maui officially concluded in late April, with the Moloka’i Armory being provided to the Maui Emergency Management Agency to serve as a long-term community resiliency hub.

By the conclusion of the activation, the Hawai’i National Guard had:

- Rescued or evacuated 138 civilians by air and ground.
- Distributed over 42,000 gallons of potable water to over 3,200 residents.
- Cleared 3,732 cubic yards of debris from 164 homes.

COLOR GUIDE

-  **Hawai'i National Guard**
-  **Hawai'i Army National Guard**
-  **Hawai'i Air National Guard**
-  **Hawai'i Emergency Management Agency**
-  **State of Hawai'i Office of Veterans' Services**
-  **Civilian Military Programs**
-  **Hawai'i Department of Defense Public Affairs**

RESOURCE GUIDE

VA Support, Benefits
 Oahu: (808) 433-0420
 Hilo: (808) 369-3538
 Kona: (808) 844-6664
 Kaua'i: (808) 369-3535
 Maui: (808) 369-3541

VA Education Benefits
 Hawai'i State Approving Authority: (808) 369-3559

Military Records
 HIARNG: (808) 844-6454
 HIANG: 1 (800) 525-0102

Common Access Card
 O'ahu: (808) 844-6425
 Big Island: (808) 844-6616
 Maui: (808) 789-0637
 Kaua'i: (808) 844-6735

Support Services/Units
dod.hawaii.gov/jstaff/
hawaii-department-of-defense-community-support/

Contact list of departments and divisions
dod.hawaii.gov/contact-us/

CONTRIBUTORS

- Spc. Donald Bond, HIARNG
- Staff Sgt. John Schoebel, HIARNG
- Spc. Daniel Barcenas, HIARNG
- HING Counterdrug Program
- Senior Master Sgt. Mysti Bicoy, HIANG
- Retired Master Sgt. Darrell Bactad, HIANG
- Col. Byron Cadiz, HIARNG
- Retired Brig. Gen. Neal Mitsuyoshi, HIDOD
- GayAnn Kino, SHRO
- Paul Choi, HRO

NEW HIRES & TRANSFERS – STATE

EMPLOYEE	DATE	POSITION	PROGRAM
Grdjan, Karissa	3/16/26	Logistics System Specialist Plan Unit (COVID19)	HIEMA
Hazel, Afan	3/16/26	DA Office Assistant (COVID19)	HIEMA
Judd, Samuel	3/16/26	Building Maintenance Helper	ENG / MAINTENANCE
Kamai, Chelsea	3/16/26	Staff Training Coordinator - Hilo	YCA - HILO
Logue, James	3/16/26	Assistant Director	YCA - KALAELOA
Nash III, Robert	3/16/26	Special Project Specialist WF	HIEMA
Sheck, Pearl	3/16/26	Director - Kalaeloa	YCA - KALAELOA
Blas, Ryan	3/16/26	Emergency Management Reserve Corp Specialist	HIEMA
Chock, Kelsey	4/1/26	Emergency Management Reserve Corp Specialist	HIEMA
Nakanishi, Michelle	4/1/26	Administrative Assistant I	OVS / HSVC
Martell, Hawea	4/16/26	General Laborer I	ENG / MAINTENANCE / KMR
Williams, Javier	4/16/26	Shift Leader	YCA / KALAELOA
Vigue, Carmela	4/16/26	Office Assistant IV (Resilience)	HIEMA
Wangu, Theoichy	5/1/26	General Laborer II	ENG / MAINTENANCE

NEW HIRES & TRANSFERS – FEDERAL

EMPLOYEE	DATE	POSITION	ORGANIZATION
Movick, Edward	3/9/26	Aircraft Pneudraulic Systems Mechanic	154 MAINT SQ, HIANG
Calaro, Blayd	3/9/26	IT Specialist (CUSTSPT)	292 CCS SQ, HIANG
Mckinnon, Amanda	3/22/26	Primary Prevention Specialist (PREV WF)	JOINT FORCE HQ, HIARNG
Combs, Sean	4/6/26	Aircraft Mechanic	JOINT FORCE HQ, HIARNG
Milburn, Brenner	4/6/26	Logistics Management Specialist	154 LGR SQ, HIANG
Gregory, Diana	4/20/26	HR Officer	HQS, HIANG

DANIEL K. AKAKA STATE VETERANS HOME

Now Accepting Applications





The Daniel K. Akaka State Veterans Home is the largest long-term care facility in Hawai'i specifically created to serve and support the needs of eligible veterans, with a full range of services including:

- 24-hour professional nursing care
- Rehabilitation services, including physical, occupational and speech therapy
- Activities and social programs
- Nutritious, well-balanced meals prepared daily

This 120-bed facility is located in Kapolei on the island of O'ahu and currently houses

80 veterans with space for 40 more residents.

If you or someone you know is a veteran interested in residency at the facility, contact Tiana Sula in the admissions department to learn about qualifications and requirements.

(808) 751-3272 • Tiana.sula@dkasvh.org





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