



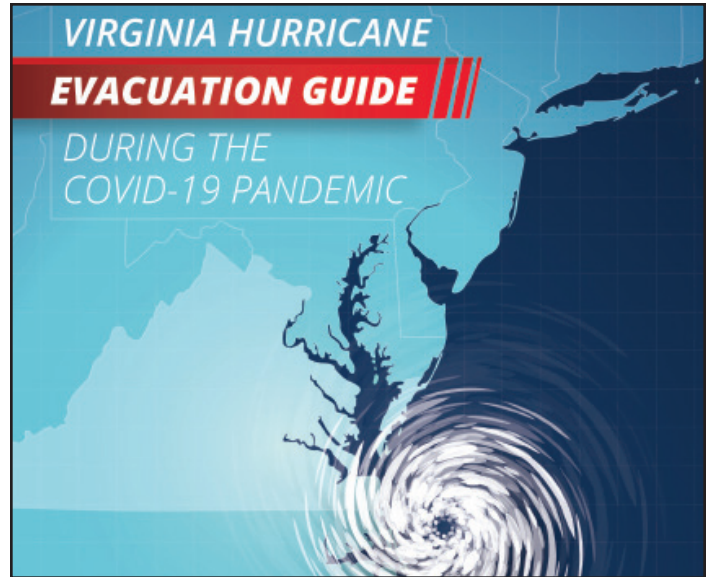
# Hurricane exercise prepares VNG for rapid response

The Virginia National Guard Joint Staff completed a virtual hurricane tabletop exercise Aug. 17, 2020, focused on improving the VNG's ability to rapidly respond to hazardous weather events in a COVID-19 environment. More than 50 Soldiers, Airmen and members of the Virginia Defense Force took part in the exercise.

"The Virginia National Guard must remain ready and responsive even in a COVID environment where much of our team is having to apply military art and science in a distributive environment," explained Brig. Gen. James W. Ring, Director of the VNG Joint Staff. "Such exercises are imperative. They require the staff to refine their internal process and assists our teams in addressing the joint capabilities that we bring to the Commonwealth of Virginia."

The notional hurricane was named "Hurricane Troy" and was identified as a major hurricane located in the Atlantic Ocean and forecast to gain significant strength over the next 4-5 days. The exercise noted the hurricane was projected to make landfall in vicinity of Hampton Roads. The Joint Staff anticipated to support multiple mission sets and expected to conduct these missions while adhering to the CDC's guidelines due to COVID-19.

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



Virginians are encouraged to consult the Virginia Hurricane Evacuation Guide During the COVID-19 Pandemic.

## Virginia National Guard News Headlines

### Pegg takes command of 329th Regional Support Group

Lt. Col. Todd A. Pegg took command of the Virginia Beach-based 329th Regional Support Group from Col. Doyle Gillis, Jr., August 19, 2020, at Fort Pickett, Virginia.

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

### VNG Soldiers compete in pistol marksmanship match

Virginia Army National Guard Soldiers assigned to the Virginia Beach-based 329th Regional Support Group and the Fort Pickett-based VNG Marksmanship Training Unit combined efforts to host the Excellence in Competition Pistol match Aug. 19, 2020, at Fort Pickett, Virginia.

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

### Teamwork, attention to detail helps LT earn Ranger Tab

When Virginia National Guardsman 1st Lt. Aidan O'Connor decided to go to Ranger School, it was partly because of leadership. He was looking for a challenge, which he knew Ranger School would deliver.

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

### 149th Fighter Squadron welcomes new commander

The 149th Fighter Squadron, Virginia Air National Guard, welcomes Lt. Col. William J. Shnowske as the new squadron commander during a change of command ceremony August 8, 2020, at Joint Base Langley-Eustis, Virginia.

Read more: <https://go.usa.gov/xGx6g>

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## Join the Virginia Army National Guard Alumni Network

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## VNG Soldier first female enlistee to complete infantry training

Pvt. Ana-Alicia Bennett, the Virginia Army National Guard's first female infantry enlistment, made history July 17, 2020, when she graduated from the U.S. Army's Infantry School at Fort Benning, Georgia. With successful completion of training, Bennett becomes one of only a few female infantry Soldiers to serve in the Virginia National Guard and the first to initially enlist and successfully complete training as an 11B.

Bennett, a resident of Mechanicsville, Virginia, arrived at Fort Benning in early February. In the months prior, she tried to prepare herself for the challenges she'd face during her training.

"When I got to Fort Benning, I went through all the emotions," Bennett said. Despite working to improve her physical fitness level, she said she still couldn't complete a leg tuck or climb a rope upon her arrival to Fort Benning. She said the training was nonstop and the physicality of the course was more challenging than she anticipated. "You don't have time to recover from the previous days' exercises, Your muscles ache and you have to keep pushing forward, pushing yourself."

Bennett said she set goals for herself throughout the course and was primarily motivated by the memory of her sister, Joelle Howard, who lost her life in a car accident just before her 20th birthday. Joelle planned to join the military herself, and Bennett joined in her honor.

"I just kept telling myself 'I can do this,'" Bennett said. "I would remind myself why I was here."

Bennett said knowing she was part of a team also helped get her through some of the course's most challenging moments.

"It totally feels like it's just you, but it's not; I look around, and I see my battle buddies and I'm thinking, 'We're all in this together,'" she said. "It kept me going; it pushed me to strive more and to be better."

While Bennett's training covered a broad spectrum of topics, weapons systems and training tasks, she said her favorite weapon was the M320 grenade launcher and that urban operations training was her all-time favorite part of the course.

"Urban operations was my favorite because I got to work side-by-side with my teammates clearing the rooms," she said. "You're trusting your battles to have your back and that is critical."

Among the least enjoyable moments of her time at Fort Benning was the tear gas chamber, Bennett said. This sinus-clearing basic training event aims to build Soldiers' confidence in their chemical defense equipment.

"The gas chamber was not too bad until the drill sergeants made me sound off with the Soldier's Creed," she said. "I died a little inside."

Another challenge for Bennett was being assigned to a leadership role during training. For 11 weeks, Bennett served as a team leader and was responsible for ensuring her team had the necessary gear required for the day's training tasks. During that time, she also led missions and made sure everyone assigned to her team knew what was expected of them.

"It wasn't frustrating until you got smoked for someone missing



**Pvt. Ana-Alicia Bennett poses for a photograph with her parents July 27, 2020, outside their home in Mechanicsville, Virginia. Bennett is the Virginia Army National Guard's first female to enlist as an 11B Infantryman and graduate the U.S. Army Infantry School.**

equipment or gear," she said. "If anyone on the team messed up, it came back on you. Luckily, I only got smoked twice."

Then, there were the challenges presented by COVID-19. Bennett's training started just as news of the virus began to spread across the nation and after just a few weeks of training, much of the country was shut down due to concerns over the spread of COVID-19. Bennett said she and her peers were required to wear masks and practice social distancing measures and they headed to the field much earlier than anticipated.

"We weren't prepared to go out into the field for another month," Bennett said. "But suddenly, we were being told to pack our gear, and we left for the field the next morning."

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

### MORE ON THE WEB

#### CSM Smith's Foxhole Report – 5th Edition

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

#### VNG SARC hosts victim advocate refresher training

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

#### Photos: 1710th receives 48 new flatbed trailers

<https://www.flickr.com/photos/vanguardpao/albums/72157715562777591>

#### Photos: VNG Soldiers train on CROWS weapons system

<https://www.flickr.com/photos/vanguardpao/albums/72157715562694881>

#### Coronavirus (COVID-19) in Virginia

<https://www.virginia.gov/coronavirus/>

