

WELCOME TO THE



JULY 11, 2025

SOUTH DAKOTA NATIONAL GUARD 2025 HONOREES



Maj. Bjarne 'Bj' Aanning

**129th Mobile Public Affairs
Detachment Commander**

Please join us in recognizing Major Bjarne "Bj" Aanning of Beaver Creek, Minnesota. With nearly 20 years of dedicated service, Aanning currently commands the 129th MPAD, bringing expertise in Public Affairs, Medical Service, and resilience training to our South Dakota National Guard.

Bj's commitment extends beyond leadership. He served as a combat medic in Southern Iraq with the 1-147 FA, and later as a Global Force Management Officer in Djibouti, supporting AFRICOM. He also contributed to flood mitigation efforts during the 2011 Missouri River flooding and participated in a training mission in South Korea.

A decorated veteran, Bj's dedication extends to his community as a lifetime member of the VFW, supporting fellow veterans and their families, and as a classroom volunteer with the Hills Beaver Creek School District. Please join us in thanking Major Aanning for his unwavering service to our state and nation.



Sgt. 1st Class Rorie Gregor

Recruiting & Retention

Please join us in recognizing Sergeant First Class Rorie Gregor of Black Hawk. Rorie is a dedicated Soldier with 24 years of service in the South Dakota Army National Guard's Recruiting and Retention Battalion, and a devoted military spouse to Captain Tyler Gregor, currently deployed with the 109th Engineer Battalion.

Rorie expertly manages personnel and training readiness for her unit, while simultaneously providing unwavering support to her family. She also honors our fallen comrades as a member of the Military Funeral Honors team, demonstrating her deep respect and commitment.

Rorie embodies selfless service and is a true role model – a dedicated Soldier, supportive spouse, and loving mother. Please join us in thanking her for her extraordinary contributions to our community and the South Dakota Army National Guard.



Sgt. 1st Class Dorinda Hiten

Senior Aviation Operations NCO, Army Aviation Support Facility

Please join us in recognizing Dorinda Hiten of Rapid City. Dorinda has dedicated 24 years of service to the South Dakota Army National Guard, currently serving as a Senior Aviation Operations NCO with DET 48 SDARNG OSA CMD.

A highly skilled 15P40, Dorinda provides critical tactical and technical expertise in aviation operations, overseeing planning, training, and intelligence. She recently deployed to the Horn of Africa as a Flight Operations NCO with Operation Enduring Freedom, where she expertly managed flight records, mission planning, and critical communications.

Dorinda's commitment to service extends beyond her military duties, as evidenced by her support of the Rapid City Rush Hockey team. She comes from a proud military family, with her husband Chris, daughter Amanda (a veteran of the US Navy), grandfather Roland (US Air Force) and father Joe (US Army) all having served our nation. Please join us in thanking Dorinda Hiten for her unwavering dedication to the South Dakota National Guard and her family's legacy of service.



Staff Sgt. Jerrica Hulbert

**Specialty Branch Recruiter, SD Army
National Guard**

Please join us in recognizing Staff Sergeant Jerrica Hulbert of Summerset. Jerrica has dedicated 19 years of service to the South Dakota Army National Guard, currently serving as a Specialty Branch Recruiter with the Recruiting and Retention Battalion.

As a 79T, Jerrica expertly recruits critical medical and dental professionals, chaplains, and legal officers for our Guard. Remarkably, she exceeded her recruiting mission during her very first year, even while completing essential training courses!

Beyond her professional duties, Jerrica demonstrates a commitment to service by volunteering at food banks throughout South Dakota and in Arkansas. She is supported by her husband, Shawn Hulbert, who also serves in the SDNG as a full-time staff member in the G4. Please join us in thanking SSG Hulbert for her dedication to our state and her outstanding contributions to the South Dakota Army National Guard.



Chief Warrant Officer 4 Mark Kehn

**Engineer Equipment Maintenance
Warrant Officer, JFHQ**

Please join us in recognizing Chief Warrant Officer Four Mark Kehn of Sturgis. Mark has dedicated an incredible 39 years of service to the South Dakota National Guard, currently serving at JFHQ as an Engineer Equipment Maintenance Warrant Officer.

Throughout his distinguished career, Mark has consistently answered the call, deploying to Iraq for 18 months during Operation Iraqi Freedom with the 842nd Engineer Company, where he led over 100 missions as a Platoon Sergeant and was awarded the Bronze Star.

He's also selflessly supported our state during over 20 State Active Duty missions, providing critical equipment operation support during emergencies like forest fires, snowstorms, and even Hurricane Katrina. Please join us in thanking CW4 Kehn for his decades of unwavering dedication to our state and nation. He is supported by his wife, Stacie, and children Brittany, Bradley, and Reegin.



Sgt. 1st Class (RET) Anson Juelfs

Budget Analyst at Joint Force Headquarters (T5)

Please join us in recognizing Sergeant First Class (Retired) Anson Juelfs of Piedmont. Anson dedicated 24 years of service to the South Dakota National Guard, most recently as a Senior Supply NCO at JFHQ. Even in retirement, he continues to serve our state as a Budget Analyst for the SD Logistics Directorate.

Throughout his career, Anson consistently answered the call, deploying to Iraq with the 842nd Engineer Company in 2003-2004 and to Afghanistan with the 200th Engineer Company in 2011-2012. He also selflessly supported our state during over 20 State Active Duty missions, operating equipment during forest fires, snowstorms, and other emergencies.

Anson's commitment extends beyond his military service. He's a dedicated community member, volunteering as a Dean of Counselors for American Legion Boy State, Head Wrestling Coach at Stagebarn Middle School, and a Faith Formation leader at Our Lady of the Black Hills Catholic Church. Please join us in thanking Anson for his unwavering dedication to South Dakota and his continued service to our community.



Jessica Mertz

National Guard Spouse

Please join us in recognizing Jessica Mertz of Rapid City. Jessica is a dedicated military spouse to Staff Sergeant Dan Mertz of the 235th MP Company, who has served our nation with honor for 15 years and completed two deployments. Jessica and Dan have been married for 19 years.

Last July 4th, when the 235th MP Company was activated for state active duty, Jessica stepped up to ensure our Soldiers didn't miss out on the holiday. Recognizing their sacrifice, she organized a BBQ at the Range Road Armory and personally delivered food to those stationed at the School of Mines, all thanks to generous donations and help from family.

Beyond this incredible act of support, Jessica also volunteers with the Yellow Ribbon Event, sharing her experiences with returning units. Her thoughtfulness and dedication to our service members make her a true asset to our community. Please join us in thanking Jessica Mertz for her unwavering support of our troops and her commitment to our state.

ELLSWORTH AIR FORCE BASE 2025 HONOREES



Airman 1st Class Grant Travis

28th Mission Support Group

Airman 1st Class Grant Travis is a Contract Specialist with the 28th Contracting Squadron. He plays a crucial role in managing the entire contracting process, allocating taxpayer dollars to ensure the Air Force effectively acquires the necessary supplies, services, and construction to accomplish its mission. Working closely with the 28th Civil Engineer Squadron, he helps oversee 9 construction projects valued at \$1 million, ensuring they are completed efficiently and to the highest standards.

Since joining the Air Force two years ago, Airman Grant has made a remarkable impact—not just through his professional expertise, but also through his commitment to service beyond his duties. Recently, his outstanding dedication to community engagement earned him the prestigious "Volunteer of the Year" award for all of Ellsworth Air Force Base in 2024.

A native of Baltimore, Maryland, Airman Travis comes from a proud military family with a strong tradition of service. He is a third generation Airman and one of two family members currently serving in the Armed Forces.



Senior Airman Karla Alicea

28th Medical Group

Senior Airman Karla Alicea is a Medical Laboratory Journeyman assigned to the 28th Healthcare Operations Squadron. She performs diagnostic testing in the areas of chemistry, hematology, urinalysis, serology and prepares further testing to multiple military reference laboratories, supporting nearly 80,000 tests annually. Her expertise directly contributes to the readiness and care of Team Ellsworth.

Recently arriving at the unit, she played a key role in the lab's inspection by the College of American Pathologists, which found no deficiencies, securing its biennial national accreditation.

Senior Airman Alicea heralds from Fountain, Colorado. Her father served in the Army as an Infantryman during Operation Iraqi Freedom. He encouraged her to join the Air Force, and she has been for nearly seven years.



Senior Airman Brittany Kenney

28th Bomb Wing/Wing Staff Agency

Senior Airman Brittany Kenney is a Public Affairs Journeyman assigned to the 28th Bomb Wing Public Affairs office. She serves as the lead for the wing's Community Engagement program where she handles a myriad of outreach events and activities including base tours, requests for speakers and support, planning special events, and coordinating flyovers.

A talented public affairs specialist, Senior Airman Kenney garnered several Air Force Global Strike Command Public Affairs awards of the year including best news photo, best multi-media product, and the second-place award for best feature story and third place for best video spot.

Senior Airman Kenney recently deployed in support of a Bomber Task Force mission to Anderson Air Force Base, Guam. Through her efforts, Ellsworth advanced Indo-Pacific Command and Japan/South Korea cooperation objectives, securing coverage with 121 news outlets. She was hand-picked to forward deploy to Misawa Air Base, Japan where she documented several B-1B hot-pit refueling missions, leveraging international media to educate an audience of 100 million across the Indo-Pacific region. Due to her work, she ranked among the top 10 percent of deployers earning a BTF top performer award.

Airman Kenney comes from Clinton, South Carolina. She has been in the Air Force for a little over two years. She put on the uniform after her husband, Derek, finished his term in the U.S. Army as a Specialist.



Staff Sgt Mckenzie Upton

28th Operations Group

Staff Sgt. Mckenzie Upton is the noncommissioned officer in charge of Host Aviation Resource Management with the 28th Operations Support Squadron. She oversees the management of 313 flight records, validates \$1.9 million in incentive pay, publishes aeronautical orders to start and stop aviation service, and annually reviews and updates 1,300 database reports.

As the HARM NCOIC, Sergeant Upton leads a team of 4 Airmen and oversees their upgrade training that includes 165 tasks. Due to her hard work and dedication, she was named the 2024 Air Force Global Strike Command Outstanding Aviation Resource Manager of the Year.

Staff Sergeant Upton comes from Danville, Kentucky. She's been in the Air Force for just over five years, following in the military footsteps of her grandfather who was in the Navy, two great uncles who were in the Army, and another great uncle who was in the Marines!



Senior Airman Shane Verkler

28th Maintenance Group

Senior Airman Shane Verkler is a Weapons Load Crew Member assigned to the 34th Bomber Generation Squadron. He maintains certification on 14 types of munitions while supporting the 28th Bomb Wing's \$50 million dollar flying program.

Airman Verkler performs scheduled maintenance inspections to include troubleshooting and repairs on the B-1B conventional rotary launcher weapons bays. While recently deployed to Anderson Air Force Base, Guam, he supported 33 Higher Headquarters missions for Bomber Task Force 25-1 in the Indo-Pacific region.

Senior Airman Verkler comes from Orangevale, California. He has been in the Air Force for three years and has a younger brother in the Army.



Jessica Le

Air Force Civilian

Jessica Le is the Public Health Flight Commander for the 28th Operations Medical Readiness Squadron. She applies preventive and public health techniques to reduce the risk of illness locally and overseas. She also develops, plans, and implements health activities, directs and conducts food safety, entomology, and public facility sanitation programs, and conducts preventive medicine communicable disease control, occupational health, food protection, site surveys and public health response. Finally, Jessica ensures members of the base – both active duty and civilian – are medically ready for deployments.

Jessica was the United States Air Force Biomedical Specialist of the Year in 2024, as well as Civilian Category III of the year in 2024 for the 28th Bomb Wing.

Jessica Le comes from Chicago, Illinois. She is an Air Force veteran, and her husband served in the U.S. Army. Coming from a military family, she has an aunt and uncle who served in the military as well.



Maria Pino

Air Force Spouse

Maria Pino is a Key Support Liaison for the 28th Maintenance Squadron. As a KSL, she acts as a vital communication link between unit leadership and families, especially during deployments or periods of separation. She also provides peer-to-peer support, information, and resources to families, helping them to connect with the unit and broader base community.

While serving in this role, Maria organized childcare for 30 military children and supported a mass briefing on the movement to Grand Forks Air Force Base for active duty members and their spouses. She also initiated contact with 40 military spouses, creating an avenue of communication for social events and military affairs.

Finally, Maria collaborates with base and community agencies and non-profit organizations where she distributes excess inventory to Youth Programs, the Child Development Center, 1st Sergeant Diamond Mart, and the Black Hills Humane Society. Outside of this position, Maria serves as the managing director of the B-One Thrift Store on base. Maria has won Key Spouse Liaison of the Quarter awards at the squadron, group, and wing level July – September 2023 and January – March 2025.

Maria Pino is from Virginia Beach, Virginia. A retired technical sergeant with 20 years in the Air Force, she comes from a strong military family where aunts and uncles have served 20+ years in the U.S. Army and Navy, as well as her spouse and cousins who are currently serving in the Air Force and Navy.

MILITARY-FRIENDLY BUSINESS OF THE YEAR



Zymurcracy Beer Company

Zymurcracy Beer Company has been selected as the 2025 Military-Friendly Business of the Year for its outstanding commitment to the military community in the Black Hills region. Founded by veterans and rooted in service, Zymurcracy proudly supports active-duty personnel, veterans, and their families – not only through military discounts and veteran hiring, but by creating a welcoming space where service members feel at home. Zymurcracy embodies the spirit of appreciation and respect for those who serve. We are honored to recognize Zymurcracy Beer Company at this year's McBride Military Appreciation BBQ.

With multiple nominations, the McBride Military Appreciation BBQ Planning Committee selected Zymurcracy Beer Company as the 2025 Military-Friendly Business of the Year because of the company's authentic and sustained dedication to the military community. From its veteran leadership and support of military-connected nonprofits to hosting veteran-focused events and crafting beers that give back to those who served, Zymurcracy's actions reflect a deep and personal commitment to service members and their families. Their efforts strengthen community ties and set an inspiring example for others to follow.

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