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TN National Guard participates in virtual cyber security exercise

SMYRNA, Tenn. – Tennessee National Guard members are participating in a joint cyber security training event at Smyrna’s Volunteer Training Site from Sept. 12-25.

Hosted by National Guard Bureau, Cyber Shield 2020 is an annual exercise that brings together more than 540 Army and Air National Guard members across the country, as well as local, state, and federal government agencies. Also involved are industry experts and election and utility officials.

The exercise is designed to increase response capabilities and preparedness by simulating malware, phishing, and other hacking attempts. This year the event has gone virtual due to the COVID-19 pandemic, but the quality of the training hasn’t faltered.

“This is some really invaluable training,” said Maj. Ryan Henry, Deputy Chief of the Tennessee National Guard’s Defensive Cyberspace Operations Element. “To be thrown into the deep end in a mock event like this, it gives everyone a sense of realism, which better prepares our Soldiers.”

Originally, the exercise was to be held in Utah, but the pandemic changed it to a virtual event with participants mostly training from where they are based. This year especially, the exercise will showcase how National Guard cyber elements can respond to and mitigate future threats despite outside, unforeseen challenges.

“Cyber exercises are uniquely qualified to operate in a distributed environment,” said Maj. Dallas Clements, Team Leader for the Defensive Cyberspace Operations Element. “However, for those cyber Soldiers and Airmen that are defending networks from opposing forces, the view from their screens has not changed.”

With all that has been affected by the current COVID-19 pandemic, training in the Tennessee National Guard is not one of them. The engagement and readiness of Tennessee’s Soldiers and Airmen remain at an all-time high. For these cyber security specialists, they will continue to train and prepare for whatever comes next.

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2nd Lt. Curtis Rookard, a Cyber Operations Officer with the Tennessee National Guard's 175th Cyber Protection Team, participates in Cyber Shield 2020, in Smyrna, Sept. 22. Cyber Shield 2020 is an annual exercise designed to increase response capabilities and preparedness among more than 540 cyber professionals across the National Guard, as well as government agencies and industry experts. (Photo by Staff Sgt. Timothy Cordeiro)

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