

## USNORTHCOM Emblem Illustrates New Commands Mission

Feature

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March 31 marked the end of the first six months of operation for United States Northern Command (USNORTHCOM), the new unified military command born out of the September 11 attacks, with the mandate of providing homeland defense for North America.

The command's mission is homeland defense and civil support, specifically to conduct operations to deter, prevent, and defeat threats and aggression aimed at the United States, its territories, and interests within the command's assigned area of responsibility; and as directed by the President or Secretary of Defense, provide military assistance to civil authorities including consequence management operations.

Illustrating that mission – quite literally – is the command's emblem.

In the emblem's forefront is the American eagle, symbolizing the nation and USNORTHCOM's commitment to national security. Representing peace and war, the eagle's right talons hold an olive branch and its left talons clutch a group of 13 arrows, signifying the first 13 states. The eagle's head is turned toward the olive branch, indicating the command's desire for peace.

On the eagle's chest is a shield, a warrior's primary piece of defensive equipment. The 13 alternating red (courage and fortitude) and white (peace and sincerity) bars on the shield represent the 13 original colonies. The chief – the upper part of the shield – in blue, embodies the colonies' strength, vigilance and perseverance. The chief holds 13 six-pointed stars, a reference to the six-pointed design from Gen. George Washington's personal flag. This flag was flown during his winter encampment at Valley Forge.

Washington had a personal protection force, which consisted of a few handpicked men from each of the colonies. This special guard carried these colors. The symbols from the Washington flag are a reminder of the efforts of the Continental Army, which served as the nation's first military organization to free and protect our homeland.

"Protecting our homeland and keeping it free is job one for us," said Gen. Ralph E. Eberhart, USNORTHCOM Commander.

Eberhart said USNORTHCOM provides "unity of command" for U.S. military actions to counter threats against homeland security.

"We are just like other regional combatant commands, with one important difference," he said. "The United States homeland is our area of responsibility."

The emblem's background depicts USNORTHCOM's area of responsibility, shielded by the eagle. On the area of responsibility are three stars, signifying each of the attack sites of September 11, 2001. These gold stars pay tribute to those who lost their lives, reminiscent of the Gold Star Mothers and Widows who lost family members in service to the nation. The gold star tradition began in World War I when white service flags were displayed from homes, businesses, schools and churches. These flags contained blue stars, representing loved ones serving in the military. Gold stars stitched over blue stars subsequently showed the nation those who gave their lives for our country, and the devotion and pride of their family.

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Five stars at the top of the emblem represent the five service branches: Army, Navy, Air Force, Marine Corps and Coast Guard. The stars are eight-pointed, signifying the eight points on a compass, and symbolizing USNORTHCOM's mission to counter the global threat of terrorism. The stars are lined up over the area of responsibility, depicting the umbrella of protection that the command provides North America.

The emblem's outside rings of red, blue and red with the white lettering of the command's name are representative of the colors of the nation and the national flag.

The symbolism of the colors and images comprising the emblem are intended to remind people of the solemn charge given to U.S. Northern Command to provide homeland defense for the United States. Once explained, the symbols seem to go right to the heart of all who see it.

"It's very well received," said Mike Perini, USNORTHCOM Public Affairs Officer. "The presentation includes a detailed explanation of the many symbols on the crest. Every age group finds something that touches them personally. We get a lot of great feedback about it."

Among the comments are words of simple appreciation for how the emblem depicts where Americans – and visitors to America – were killed in the three terrorist attacks on September 11. Many who remember World War II identify with the gold stars on the emblem – reminiscent of the stars that hung in the windows of homes where people lost loved ones in combat. Veterans of the five branches of service say they like seeing the five stars at the top of the emblem, knowing that their particular branch is represented by the uppermost star.

"It's really nice to see the impression that the shield makes on people," said Perini.

USNORTHCOM officials have briefed hundreds of people from across the country about the command's mission, organization and the symbology and significance of its emblem.

"Listening to the brief gives people an understanding of what USNORTHCOM is and how we operate," said Perini. "But when the presentation is over and the lights come up and people are heading back to work, the image that sticks in their mind is the image of the USNORTHCOM emblem."