

WASHINGTON MILITARY DEPARTMENT

# EVERGREEN

MAGAZINE  
SPRING 17

## HomeTown Hero

How serving in the [Washington National Guard](#) is helping a Pierce County Deputy **save lives**.



**SHERIFF**  
**PIERCE**



Photo by Spc. Chris Piotrowski



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# WINTER WONDERLAND

Story by  
Spc. Tyler Main



*Unit Finds Warmth in Teamwork During Winter Survival Training*

Photo by Spc. Tyler Main



Huddled together in snow caves at night, amid up to five feet of snow, about 30 members of Delta Company, 898th Brigade Engineer Battalion struggled to stay warm, but never lost their reason for coming: survival and teamwork.

For three days and two nights, the Washington National Guard soldiers perfected the ability to build fires, do land navigation exercises and survive – even as temperatures dropped to the single digits.

The February basic winter survival course at Ranger Creek State Airport near Mt. Rainier was led by Washington Air National Guard airman Staff Sgt. Brant Shaw, a member of the 116th Air Support Operations Squadron, who is also certified in several mountaineering courses.

“This training provides a lot of opportunities they may not get day to day, being M-I (Military Intelligence) and usually working out of a secure room,” Shaw said, amid the sounds of crows in the trees and coyotes in

Photos by Spc. Tyler Main



Photo by Spc. Tyler Main

# WINTER WONDERLAND

the distance. "But they could be all over the world, so this challenges them on many different levels."

The uniqueness of the training environment was invaluable. Upon arriving at Ranger Creek State Airport via Chinook helicopter, the soldiers were greeted by several feet of snow. Even maneuvering through the snow proved to be quite a burden with soldiers trudging through the terrain from their helicopter to get to an acceptable clearing before donning snow shoes. Shaw was able to demonstrate skills that helped them adapt to the cold and their surroundings, including how to build different types of shelter, all of which included building walls that were packed by snow.

"Snow makes a great insulator and air often gets trapped while passing through, which in turn lowers the amount of heat transfer," Shaw said.

The goal, Shaw said, was to get the soldiers out of their comfort zones and into environments that present challenges for soldiers to carry out the mission at hand. This was the unit's second time participating in the exercise in three years.

The soldiers were taught a number of skills during their expedition, one of which was fire



Photo by Spc. Tyler Main

building and they even competed as teams to see who could build their fire the quickest. The overarching theme of the weekend was to work as a team.

"This is huge for us," said Spc. Arthur Rodriguez, a soldier in D Co., 898 BEB. "The ability to make these memories together, learning how to survive out here, is going to help us be more cohesive as a unit."

Even though the soldiers were expecting to just get skills to help them

in harsh winter conditions, they ended up getting a lot more in return. The unit grew as individuals and as a team. By toughing out the outdoor elements and maintaining a warrior mentality, they bonded through that experience. The training could act as a valuable asset for any unit and that is what Staff Sgt. Shaw truly believes.

"Having a great attitude makes all the difference, which these guys did, they were troopers all weekend and that goes a long way," Shaw added.

**“The ability to make these memories together, learning how to survive out here, is going to help us be more cohesive as a unit.” -  
Spc. Arthur Rodriguez, a soldier in D Co., 898 BEB**



## New Readiness Center Showcases Guard History and Future

# A NEW ERA

Story by Capt. Joseph Siemandel

**A**midst the trees and historic buildings that dot Camp Murray now stands a new, state-of-the-art readiness center.

It took five years and a lot of help, but on the last week of March, the Washington National Guard officially opened the new Pierce County Readiness Center (PCRC) on Camp Murray, once again giving the Tacoma area an armory for its citizen-soldiers. The facility replaces the century-old Tacoma Armory, which had to be vacated in December, 2011 due to safety concerns.

“When the Tacoma Armory needed to be closed, the 96th Troop Command units that were affected kept their heads up and continued on with their mission,” said Maj. Gen. Bret Daugherty, the adjutant general. “Even with our love of history, we wouldn’t let that impede the needs of our organization and that is providing the best facilities moving into the

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Nearly 200 guests took part in the historic ribbon cutting on March 29, 2017, marking the official opening of the PCRC, which gives the units of the 96th Troop Command a new home.

“Facilities like this provide us the best resources to support our guardsmen,” said Col. Dan Dent, commander, 96th Troop Command. “This is a world class facility for our world class citizen-soldiers.”

After breaking ground in February 2015, Puyallup-based Absher Construction got right to work on the 80,060 square foot building.

“We are so happy we were able to serve our community and build this beautiful facility,” said Dan Absher, president, Absher Construction. “We have a long history here in Pierce County and this award winning facility is another example.”



Photo by Sgt. 1st Class Jason Kriess



**In January** the PCRC was named “Best in Class for the Heavy Commercial” category by ICF Builder Magazine and runner-up for “Building of the Year” by the Seattle Daily Journal of Commerce.

“The Pierce County Readiness Center was an outstanding example of the power of collaboration through the design-build process,” said Absher. “The entire team — including Department of Enterprise Services, the Washington Military Department, WJA Design Collaborative and the many sub-consultants and subcontractors involved — worked as a unified team to make this project succeed.”

The PCRC took 77 weeks to build and came in under budget at \$30 million. It is equipped with multiple classrooms, a small gym, locker rooms, equipment storage areas, unit common areas with work stations for every soldier that is stationed in the building, computer lab, kitchen, multi-use drill floor, and a large maintenance bay and parking for tactical vehicles.

“We look at the PCRC as the mold for the rest of the Guard, not just here in Washington, but even at the national level,” said Lt. Col. Adam Iwaszuk, director, construction and facilities management, Washington National Guard. “We have been lucky to have three projects in the next four years, and will continue to fight for the best facilities for our Guard in the future.”

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Cover Story

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# HomeTown Hero

# “I knew exactly what **injury** he had and immediately I knew what to do.” - **Deputy Sanchez**

STORY BY SGT. 1ST CLASS JASON KRIESS

**W**hen Deputy Sergio Sanchez arrived at the scene of a drive-by shooting during his night patrol shift with the Pierce County Sheriff's

Department in Spanaway, Washington, he came upon a crime scene with a victim bleeding from his leg. Sanchez, 28, a six-year veteran in law enforcement, exited his squad car with his personal first aid kit and instantly went to work.

“I knew exactly what injury he had and immediately I knew what to do,” Sanchez said. “It was essentially what I learned in [68] Whiskey school in San Antonio.”

The victim had a bullet wound that went straight through his leg and was bleeding profusely. It took Sanchez three to five minutes to stabilize the victim's injuries with gauze and a tourniquet for transport to the local hospital.



Sanchez didn't learn his life-saving skills on the police force though. One weekend a month he serves as a Combat Medic specialist with Headquarters and Headquarters Battery, 2nd Battalion, 146th Field Artillery Regiment.

Having a career and formal military training with the Washington National Guard as a combat medic provides Sanchez an extra skill set that sets him apart from his peers on the force.

“We don't usually see that kind of qualification and experience with a brand new deputy,” said Sergeant Glen Carpenter, Sanchez's shift supervisor.

Most deputies do not have formal training as a medic or a first responder. Having Sanchez's talent and ability to provide life-saving first aid to victims of crimes makes him a valuable resource to have in his precinct.



## Hometown Hero: The Story of Deputy Sergio Sanchez

“**[We]** have a pretty diverse department and many of the different sections have people who are cross-trained in TCCC (Tactical Combat Casualty Care) but not at the patrol level,” said Carpenter. “He was probably selected for the extra talent that he has.”

The drive-by shooting was not the only time Sanchez used his Army medic skills. A couple weeks after the shoot-

ing, he was called to the scene of a hit-and-run. He arrived on the scene and saw a man lying in the middle of the road.

“When we got closer we saw a large amount of blood coming from his head,” recalled Sanchez. “He was not responsive and barely breathing.”

That’s when Sanchez’s training kicked in and he was able to provide C spine



control, a procedure that stabilizes the neck and spinal cord. He applied gauze and pressure to the head injury and soon the victim began to show signs of life.

“He eventually started moaning so that was a good sign. I just kept him stabilized until [the] fire [department] got there,” Sanchez said.

Sanchez was hit with the medic bug when he was a young boy. His father, an Army veteran, asked him to clean out a closet in his childhood home. Little did he know that seemingly innocuous chore would send him on a path that would shape the person he’d become. As he was cleaning out the closet he came across an old first-aid bag from his father’s time in the Army.

“[I] was immediately drawn to what was inside and spent hours studying the many different pieces of medical equipment.”

Sanchez, himself, doesn’t think that he, alone, saved these two people’s lives, but he was a significant contributing factor. As a combat medic he is trained to treat, stabilize and move them on to higher care.

“That’s exactly what I do. I just treat and stabilize until fire personnel get there,” said Sanchez. “They start doing more medical intervention [that I’m not able to do].”

Being both a law enforcement officer and a combat medic is the perfect combination. Training as a medic helps him be a much more valuable commodity to the profession that he loves so much.

“Being a deputy ... I love it, not every day is the same,” said Sanchez. “Being a medic adds a way for me to be helpful and effective to the citizens and my partners.”



Photo Courtesy of Spc. Sergio Sanchez



Photo by Sgt. 1st Class Jason Kriess

Gov. Jay inslee honors Spc. Sergio Sanchez with the Governor's recognition award. The award was given to one soldier and one airman of the Washington National Guard.

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# 2 WEEKS READY



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# The Flight

Having a brother can be an adventure. Big brothers are always showing off. Little brothers are always tagging along. And brothers fight. All the time.

For brothers Noel and Justin Larson, growing up was no different.

“We fought constantly as children — our poor mother. At the same time, we always had each other’s back,” Noel said. “We could have a knock-down fight one minute and the next minute be building a fort together.”

It was their competitive nature that brought out the drive to be successful and made the afternoon of Feb. 11, 2017 special for the Larson brothers. With more than 54 years of combined military service, 10,000 flying hours and multiple overseas deployments, Noel and Justin Larson were promoted to Chief Warrant Officer 5 (CW5) and Chief Warrant Officer 4 (CW4) respectively during a short and casual ceremony at the Army Aviation Support Facility on Joint Base Lewis-McChord.

“I have known Justin and Noel for years,” said Chief Warrant Officer 5 Teresa Burgess, Command Chief Warrant Officer, Washington National Guard. “I have been blessed to have flown with them stateside and in Iraq. While Noel flew special operations flights, Justin was there when I took off and when I landed ensuring my aircraft was properly maintained and ready to go for the next crew. That always meant a lot to me.”

Noel Larson is a year and four months younger than his older brother Justin and joined the Washington National Guard in 1988. He graduated flight school in 1995.

“Justin had a bigger passion [for aviation growing up] and it was contagious; the bug got me,” said Noel, aviation standardization officer, Headquarters and Headquarters Company, 66th Theater Aviation Command.

Justin took a different path to the helicopter cockpit. He joined the Marine Corps in 1988 and left the Marines before joining the Washington National Guard in 1993.

“We’ve always loved aviation,” said Justin, aviation material officer, Headquarters and Headquarters Company, 1st Battalion, 168th Aviation Regiment. “We just didn’t know how we wanted to go about it in the beginning.”

On any given day, the brothers can be seen diligently providing support for the state’s hectic aviation mission. Noel could be on one side of the building training the future UH-60 Black Hawk pilots coming in to the organization while Justin could be in the maintenance bay ripping apart and putting back together the same helicopters that the brothers have flown for years.

Story by  
Cpt. Joseph Siemandel

Aviation Brothers share  
special promotion

# Brothers

"I work on training pilots and I break stuff. My brother fixes the stuff and takes it on check rides to verify it works properly," Noel said.

For the last 24 years, the Larson brothers have been counted on to provide critical support to the state of Washington during many emergency response missions. Both brothers flew missions in Louisiana after the destruction of Hurricanes Katrina and Rita. They provided support in the aftermath of the State Route 530 Landslide and have flown numerous missions dealing with floods and fires throughout the state.

It's the work the brothers have done while deployed that has given them national recognition.

On the night of March 25, 2008, while deployed to an undisclosed location, Noel was the pilot and mission coordinator onboard a UH-60 Black Hawk. The helicopter was configured to perform reconnaissance in direct support of a raid being conducted by coalition forces.

During planning, it became evident that poor weather was going to limit the number of air assets able to support the mission. However the command determined that the mission would proceed. As Noel and his crew arrived over the objective, the restricted visibility from a dust storm made it difficult to gain the normal

levels of situational awareness. Despite the added difficulty, Noel directed a detailed and methodical reconnaissance of the objective area and wrote a succinct report that allowed the ground force, now moving into the area, to better understand the terrain and enemy situation.



Photo by Sgt. Jodi Eastham

As the ground forces dismounted, the enemy opened fire and the assault force took immediate casualties.

"As soon as they started taking fire, we were going over our options on how we could help them," said Noel. "My aircraft was already in the air and the medical aircraft couldn't get into the air so my team and I landed to help the wounded."

From the citation: "Through skillful use of the sensors and in concert with impeccable crew coordination, Noel Larson and the aircrew were able to guide the assault force to the selected landing zone while simultaneously maneuvering the aircraft through numerous hazards to include enemy fire and into the landing zone on their first attempt. This excellence in airmanship provided the best possible opportunity for the wounded soldiers' survival."

For his heroic actions and operating his aircraft while under heavy enemy fire, Noel earned the Distinguished Flying Cross. This is awarded to a member of the U.S. armed forces who distinguishes themselves by heroism or extraordinary achievement in an aerial flight undertaken voluntarily and beyond the call of duty.

While Noel has been recognized for his accomplishments in the air, Justin continues to break records and be recognized for his work fixing the helicopters that they fly.

"Justin's proactive nature in getting broken aircraft fixed during deployment has set a national record for getting aircraft

back in the air,” said Brig. Gen. Wallace Turner, the assistant adjutant general, Washington Army National Guard. “He’s one of the best test pilots in the nation.”

With so many accolades and military honors bestowed upon them, the brothers, ever humble, continue to give their support to Washington aviation and each other day in and day out.

“It was pretty awesome [being promoted together]. I think we can both say that it is nice to see your siblings succeed and in this case it was simultaneous reward,” Noel said.

Humble and hard-working, the Larson brothers continue to be a staple in the Washington Army National Guard.

“We are blessed to have two of the hardest working, talented aviators in Washington,” Burgess said. “The organization is in good hands with the two of them leading the way in training and maintenance.”

Photo by Sgt. Jodi Eastham



Photo by Sgt. 1st Class Jason Kriess



Photo by Tech Sgt. Mike Brown

# FIGHTING FLOODS

**F**or about three days, more than 40 Washington National Guard soldiers set aside their day jobs to come to the aid of their fellow Washingtonians after Gov. Jay Inslee declared a state of emergency.

Heavy rain inundated the town of Sprague, Washington causing multiple rivers to crest sending rising waters down city streets and into residential areas. The Guard spent March 20 to 23 in the Sprague area.

“When I first got the call that we were going to be activated, I was both excited and a little nervous,” said officer in charge 2nd Lt. Erin Hagerty, 1041st Transportation Company. “This would be the first time that I would be activated to respond to a disaster.”

The 1041st Transportation Company made up the bulk of the activation with 22 soldiers. The rest of the group came from the 792nd Chemical Company and Headquarters and Headquarters Company, 420th Chemical Battalion.

There were about six public works employees from Sprague, who were exhausted and Hagerty said she and the other soldiers were more than happy to offer some relief. One of the employees said it was nice to be able to take a break and know that the Guard was continuing to help.



Photo by Tech Sgt. Mike Brown

The flood waters weren't the only thing the task force had to prevent. Soggy boots and "sandbag burn," similar to rug burn, were quickly making themselves known but taking precautionary measures helped make sure there were no injuries.

"I also ensured that all soldiers were changing their socks regularly," Hagerty said. "They went through socks like candy!"

Starting a friendly competition between soldiers was a way to break up the monotony of filling sandbags. A couple groups started a sandbag filling competition to see how quickly they could fill and place two pallets of sandbags — 9 minutes and 24 seconds was the fastest time.



Courtesy Photo by 2nd Lt. Erin Hagerty

At the end of the mission, the task force filled and placed 15,000 sandbags and used 258 tons of sand.

"I was extremely proud of the work [they] did. They worked hard and without complaint," Hagerty said. "They all had a never-quit attitude and a smile on their faces."

"A BIG thank you to the community members, students and volunteers who helped bagging sand and getting it where it needed to be," the city of Sprague said on its website. "We truly appreciate your help and support of the community!"



Photo by Tech Sgt. Mike Brown



# NEW 911 DIRECTOR EXPERIENCE TO

**New 911 Director Adam Wasserman brings the public safety answer to the U.S. Coast Guard command center that hung above the US Coast Guard the last vessel he commanded.**

ABOUT  
THE  
PHOTO

**G**rowing up in Colorado, Adam Wasserman's life was devoted to his friends, family and football. It was football that led him on a path to the U.S. Coast Guard Academy. And it was a career in the Coast Guard that eventually led to his new job as the state enhanced 911 coordinator.

It's a position he started a couple months ago.

"There's yet to be a day when I haven't felt excited about coming to work," Wasserman said.

Wasserman was a standout quarterback playing for a top division high school, who had already received a scholarship to an in-state university in Colorado when he was approached by the U.S. Coast Guard about the possibility of playing football for the Academy in New London, Connecticut.

"Here I was a mountain kid and I knew how to swim, but I'd never even seen the ocean before," Wasserman said. "But I loved the chance. And when I graduated from the Academy, I got assigned to my first ship – and then the rest of my career I spent mainly on ships."

Photo by Steven Friederich

# CTOR BRINGS COAST GUARD

## D STATE JOB

Story by Steven Friederich

**Wasserman stands in front of a map of emergency points across the state. The retired commander is holding the command pennant of the USCGC Harriet Lane based out of Virginia, commanded before retiring.**

As a graduate of the U.S. Coast Guard Academy, Wasserman automatically became an officer.

In his 22 years in the Coast Guard, he was assigned to five different ships and was the commanding officer of two of them. He'd find himself stationed in Astoria, Oregon; Puerto Rico, Seattle, Hawaii, Mississippi and Virginia. His most recent position was as the Fleet Operations Manager for the Coast Guard's Atlantic Area, where he led an entire fleet of 27 ships.

"Getting to know the differences and the special needs of every ship underneath me has definitely prepared me for this job in 911," Wasserman said. "So, now I move into 911 and now I have 39 counties – they don't report through me, but we certainly help each and every one of them – from the smaller counties that only have a couple people on staff to the big counties with multiple centers."

He also worked heavily with contracts, which will help him as the state continues moving forward building a new Next Generation 911 network through a \$45 million contract with Comtech TCS.

The new network will transport calls from the call-maker to the call-taker and be custom designed to make sure it's accessible to all types of devices/methods for contacting 911.

Wasserman takes over for former state E911 Coordinator Ziggy Dahl, who helped facilitate the contract before he left in December.

"The state office was in a good spot so it's not like I had to come back and do my own disaster recovery," Wasserman said. "The staff here is amazing. They run the show. Our main job is to manage the network, to oversee and coordinate all the counties and their connection to the network."

The new next generation 911 will be able to do videos, photos, texts, emoji's even.

"When an operator has a video then the firetruck coming on to the scene will be able to get a quick look before they come on scene or if you get a picture of a license plate of someone speeding away from an accident, you'll be able send that and police can use it right away," Wasserman said. "When you text Dominos that you want pizza delivered, they can not only take your order but also know where you are. 911 should have the capability, too."

The state also helps coordinate some of the money that comes in that taxpayers pay on their phone bills – 70 cents per bill goes directly to the counties while 25 cents per bill goes to the State E911 Office.

"Every phone generates tax dollars," Wasserman said. "That equates to about \$25 million a year and with that money we purchase the network and help offset costs. For the smaller counties, some of our funding helps to go for call takers and operation costs. For the bigger counties, we'll pay for training and the network, which is the big cost."

Besides his 911 duties, Wasserman will also help coordinate disasters in the policy room of the state Emergency Operations Center. That's an area where his Coast Guard experience will prove especially useful, according to Washington Emergency Management Director Robert Ezelle.

"He has several years of emergency management experience running several key programs and demonstrated an innate ability to foster strong

partnerships in the emergency management community," Ezelle said. "He is very familiar with the National Response Framework and has worked closely with FEMA, Department of Defense, Department of Homeland Security and other federal, state and local agencies conducting emergency operations in response to some of the nation's biggest disasters including Hurricane Katrina."

Following Hurricane Katrina, Wasserman said he was second in command on a vessel based out of Mississippi. He said he was on leave when the hurricane struck, but reported back as soon it was clear he'd be needed. His son's school was destroyed and for two years he and his family practically lived apart, with his family relocating back to Washington state – which is where his wife is from (and one of the reasons they decided to come back to the state following his retirement).

"Our ship went through Gulfport, Mississippi, which was devastated," Wasserman said. "Immediately after the storm went through, there was rescue work. There was just so much of the area that was gutted. From land, our Coast Guard ship did communications and my guys also went into town and helped bring food and water."

Besides his experience at Hurricane Katrina, he said he also helped with response activities for typhoons when he was based in Hawaii and other hurricanes and storms when he was commander of the USCGC HARRIET LANE, a 270-foot medium-endurance cutter home-ported at Base Support Unit Portsmouth, Virginia.

"The Navy sends their vessels out of the way, but in the Coast Guard, we chased the hurricanes across the Atlantic," Wasserman said. "The people in the Coast Guard are just outstanding. And I'm seeing the same thing in emergency management and the 911 community. The people here are dedicated and it's such a passionate community, where people stay and do this work for the service of their communities."

# GROWING TOGETHER

Story by Steven Friederich



Photo by Steven Friederich

A few days back, Michelle Rauback says she had parked her car and taken her two-year-old son out to go shopping. Usually, she'd just pick her son up and cross the street. It's faster.

But, on this day, he was insisting on holding her hand so he could walk across the street with her.

"And I realize in that moment after we cross the street, he's telling me 'let me grow,'" said Rauback, one of the longest serving cadre at the Washington Youth Academy. "He's telling me that he's ready for these next steps in life. And we need to teach our parents that."

It's a lesson she's helping to instill in the cadets at the Washington Youth Academy: It's time to grow up. It's time to take care of yourself.

"Sometimes parents will push you, but you also need to push yourselves, you have to teach yourself to grow and to move forward," Rauback said. "When I'm dealing with 18-year-old boys, that's definitely the language we need to talk to them about: How to be men who can take care of themselves as well as a family someday. What kind of model of a person do you expect to be? This is what you're working on becoming right now. Not tomorrow. Today."

Rauback is one of the master sergeants with the Spartans, the platoon made up of 17- and 18-year-old boys.

"It's a great place to work," Rauback said. "My team is easy to work with and we all communicate and have the same goals. I feel like we're all very close and we all work well. And we easily have each other's backs. That makes a great morale booster to have a great team here."

She's been there since the facility was first constructed in 2008 and still remembers wearing a hard hat to tour the barracks. To the cadets, she's a drill sergeant at first, but ultimately becomes a parent-type figure to many of the teens, helping them figure out why they're really at the Academy, what poor steps or decisions led them on the path to needing to get back the high school credits they're missing.

Rauback said when she was hired, she wasn't sure what she was expecting – except that the job would entail dishing out a lot of discipline.

She embraces the idea that the Academy is about credit retrieval. Cadets spend 22 weeks on campus, where they earn up to 8 high school credits – about 1.3 years of high school.

"I never once thought of these cadets as delinquents," Rauback said. "When I was in high school, I struggled to pass certain academics like math, but I had other ways to deal with it and cope with it. But there were other people in school who couldn't deal with it and they just dropped out. They weren't in trouble. They just



had a hard time. That allows me to not look at the cadets in any negative kind of way.”

Rauback said she’s encountered too many teens that have yet to figure out why they’re really at the Academy, though.

“You have to work with what is in your control so when you have them, what can you do to help them help themselves to make their situations better for them?” Rauback says. “When you get them out of a toxic environment, you can see improvement right away.”

“A lot of times they don’t even know what they want,” Rauback added. “They think they do. But they don’t really know yet the potential that they could become. And each cadet has different ways to get them to ‘click.’ It’s all unique styles and you just have to keep working with them to figure it out while maintaining one standard – which is what’s challenging.”

Rauback said she’s also learned to let go on situations beyond her control.

“Any one of the cadets at any given point can draw your heart to where you just want to help them and save them, but you can’t do that,” she said. “You just have to continue to work that boundary

and it’s hard. We had two troubling ones just this class and one of them left. And that’s still impacting me – and he doesn’t know, but everyday I’m wondering how is he doing since he left here?”

Rauback said, pretty quickly, she realized she couldn’t bring the cadets home with her.

“These teens don’t understand the impact they can impart upon us immediately and how it’s everlasting,” she said. “I would probably have over a hundred kids at home now and my husband would not be too happy.”

Rauback said she used to do some work in law enforcement and her husband is currently a police officer. Those experiences have helped her in her job at the Academy.

“You have to work with what is in your control so when you have them; what can you do to help them help themselves to make their situations better for them?” she said. “When you get them out of a toxic environment, you can see improvement right away.”



Photos by Steven Friederich

In the end, when she’s had a bad day, she said something interesting tends to happen: A cadet graduate will send her a message or an email.

“It’s almost like somebody can read my mind out there,” she said. “But they talk about how much I made a difference for them. It’s something powerful and it’s always at the right time. It makes me say, ‘This is why I do this.’ It refocuses me. It helps me remember. They don’t realize how much that really helps and sometimes it feels like they’ve helped me more than I’ve helped them. I try to teach them that it’s about giving. I try to help them give the love and care they need.”

# BEST WARRIOR: STATE LEVEL

Story and Photos by Spc. Tyler Main



Competitors arrived from all over the state of Washington eager with an opportunity to represent their respective units at a high level. Soldiers competed for four long days to stake their claim at being the Washington National Guard's 2017 Best Warrior. This annual competition tests participants both mentally and physically in a series of grueling events.

"Train for everything," said Sgt. Jason O'Neal, 1st Battalion, 303rd Cavalry Regiment, without hesitation.

The first day welcomed the soldiers with an Army Physical Fitness Test, an oral board, a uniform inspection and a written test. This would be a microcosm of the rest of the contest — a test of both body

and mind. The weekend consisted of many late nights and early mornings, but the warriors were up for every challenge. "This was a true gut check for me," O'Neal said. "After being part of the support staff as a driver during last year's event and seeing it from that perspective. This is something I wanted to do for myself, to see if I could accomplish it."

This event tested the soldiers' proficiency in basic warrior skills, but it also tested their heart. Whether it was a 12-mile ruck march or doing night land navigation in the freezing rain, the contestants never backed down, and they would be the first to thank each other for that. The best warrior competition is unique in that winning is the goal, but seeing a competitor reach new heights is equally as rewarding.

"Even though we were all there as competitors, everyone was rooting for one another," said Cadet Kevin Jiang, Alpha Company, 1-161 Infantry Battalion. "That kind of blew my mind. Everyone was really pushing one another. We felt like a family. I loved it. I loved the comradery."

The competition embodied the core values of the Guard while bringing out the best of each challenger. Although there could only be one winner for each division, one representing the enlisted soldiers and the other representing the non-commissioned officers, there was not one disappointed person at the end of the weekend.

The winners of the 2017 Washington National Guard Best Warrior Competi-



Photo by Spc. Tyler Main

# REGIONAL BEST WARRIOR COMPETITION

May 3rd - 7th

Spc. Brock Mudge  
C Co, 3-161 Infantry Regiment  
WASHINGTON NATIONAL GUARD  
Enlisted Soldier Best Warrior

Staff Sgt. Mark Adame  
C Co, 181st Brigade Support Battalion  
WASHINGTON NATIONAL GUARD  
Non-Commissioned Officer Best Warrior

A message from one of the essays during the competition.

**“A strong sense of purpose leads to an increase of morale, as well as motivation and a driving desire to achieve one’s goals.”**

- Cadet Kevin Jiang, Alpha Company, 1-161 Infantry Battalion

tion were Spc. Brock Mudge, Charlie Company, 3rd Battalion, 161 Infantry Regiment, representing the enlisted soldiers, and Staff Sgt. Mark Adame, Charlie Company, 181st Brigade Support Battalion, representing the non-commissioned officers.

Each warrior did their best and took on an individual competition as a team and each competitor is better because of it. Alongside an impressive title and extensive bragging rights, the winning soldiers will represent the state of Washington in the Regional Best Warrior Competition. The regional competition will be held in various parts of Washington from May 3-7.



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## Around the Department

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Members of the 141st Air Refueling Wing hosted “Pilot for a Day” candidate Gabe Tesch for a tour of Fairchild Air Force Base, Washington. Gabe spent the day visiting several work centers throughout the base receiving hands on instruction and briefings on what it takes to be a KC-135 Stratotanker pilot. The “Pilot for a Day” program provides disadvantaged or seriously ill children a chance to spend the day with members of the Washington Air National Guard training as an honorary pilot.



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Photos by Tech Sgt.  
Mike Brown



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## Around the Department

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Members from all over the Washington Military Department teamed up in effort to give back the community. The result, more than 1,000 pounds of food plus cash donations to buy the equivalent of 800 more pounds of food were donated to the food bank at the Tillicum/American Lake Gardens Community Service Center.

Lt. Col. Angela Gentry and Maj. Jeff Reese, both of 341st Military Intelligence, joined members of the public affairs team to deliver the food on Feb. 15.

Claudia Fisher, a program specialist at the food bank, said that last month about 360 families were helped with food.

“This is around the time when the shelves are getting bare and, as you saw, there were some bare shelves in there,” Fisher said. “Thank you so much to the Guard and the Military Department for helping us.”

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Photos by Steven Friederich



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## Around the Department

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Lt. Gen. L. Scott Rice, Director of the Air National Guard, recently visited Washington National Guard airmen to learn more about the many missions of the 141st Air Refueling Wing, 194th Wing and the Western Air Defense Sector. He spent time with the cyber unit and the ASOS as well.



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Photo by Spc.  
Tyler Main



Rafael Estevez and Tristan Allen of the Washington Emergency Management Division helped facilitate a meeting involving local emergency management officials to craft fire adapted communities, which take action before, during and after a wildfire. Derrick Hiebert-Flamm, not pictured, also talked about recovery planning efforts.



Around the  
Department

Photo by Emily Troisi

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## Around the Department

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Members of the Washington National Guard were recognized by Gov. Jay Inslee and state lawmakers for their tireless work protecting lives and property in Washington.

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Photos by Sgt. 1st Class Jason Kriess



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## Around the Department

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The Washington National Guard Senior Enlisted Leader hosted the fourth Washington Military Department Peer to Peer Workshop on Camp Murray.

The workshop presented a great opportunity for younger soldiers and airmen to work side by side with civilians across our diverse organization and learn about each other's role.

"During times of disaster, knowing our peers in the Washington National Guard, Emergency Management Division, Washington Youth Academy and State Guard can help us accomplish our mission of Safeguarding Lives and Property in Washington!" Chief Master Sgt. Trisha Almond said.

## Around the Department

In March, LTG Apirat and a delegation from the Royal Thai Army visited Camp Murray as part of the Washington National Guard's State Partnership Program. After meeting with Maj. Gen. Daugherty and others, the group had the chance to visit the State Emergency Operations Center and learn about Washington Emergency Management Division.

Washington has had a formal partnership with the Kingdom of Thailand since 2002 as part of The National Guard State Partnership Program.



Photo by Spc. Tyler Main

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Video Feature

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Video by Sgt. 1st Class  
Jason Kriess

Master Sgt. Darrell DeGroff says when he was serving overseas a decade ago, three of his best friends died. Those deaths have stuck with him during his military career and given him a passion to ensure that soldiers' meals are the best possible.

DeGroff, who is now the food services director for the Washington National Guard, says, "Everyday, I open up a dining facility or restaurant, I see my old buddies standing there, saying, 'D., what's for dinner?' I try to bring that passion. It is hard work but we make a huge difference in their lives."

For each of the past five years, DeGroff has helped organize a kind of Food Services Expo bringing soldiers together with the food services and restaurant industry to talk about best practices. The expo takes place at Joint Base Lewis-McChord, which includes a culinary arts competition for high schoolers and college students, food and product demonstrations and a chance to sample food that could potentially be served to Guard members during a menu board trial period.

The expo also connects soldiers, who have been trained to cook, with restaurants and businesses that are looking to hire cooks or simply offer networking opportunities for when soldiers need a job, they know who to call.

U.S. Army Specialist Aaron Perchaz said he ended up speaking to chefs visiting from Red Wind Casino in Lacey about potential jobs they have available.

# What's Cooking?

Story and photos by  
Steven Friederich

## Washington National Guard serves up a legacy of food



DeGroff said Compass Group, which does food service for major technology companies in the Seattle area, was interviewing soldiers on the spot for potential job openings.

"If you own a restaurant, you need people to show up to work," DeGroff said. "You need people that understand if you're not profitable, they don't have a job. You need people who care about the mission. You want people who aren't on drugs and don't steal. Well, when you come to us and interview our folks, they've already had background checks. They meet qualifications that employers are working with and, most like-

ly, they already have their health care taken care of by the Guard and they can buy health care cheaper than an employer pays for it."

"I think this whole event is awesome," Perchaz said. "You get to meet a lot of people who teach you things. Master Sgt. DeGroff just does an amazing job connecting soldiers, not just in the Guard but in the regular Army, too. These restaurants want us because we know how to cook good food and I think that's awesome." Perchaz said he learned more in a half hour watching Stewart Carlson, owner of Stewart's Meats, deconstruct meat than he has reading a lifetime of cook books or cooking technique guides.

For Carlson, the event was a chance to get to meet potential customers while also passing on a lifetime of knowledge. His family has owned Stewart's Meats in Yelm since 1933.

"This is a good educational opportunity for everyone to get involved with," Carlson said, adding this was the first time he'd demonstrated in 40 years, but would do it again for the Guard in a heartbeat. "Everybody has to eat. The soldiers and the teens come and learn from different vendors and suppliers. Today, we had so many people interested in just what we do and how we do it."

Besides Stewart's, there were demonstrations on how to do Italian cuisine, Irish food and Japanese food. Chef Leland Henderson,

Executive Corp Chef of Spokane Produce, showed attendees proper ways to cut melon and Master Sgt. DeGroff even deconstructed a huge albacore tuna.

“So you’re asking, ‘Why in the world would you want to buy a whole fish when you could just buy a fillet?’” DeGroff said. “I want us to take a look and have the skill sets to break this fish down and have a higher quality product and still stay within our price point.”

Price point is the key for most of the expo.

In 2012, when DeGroff came to Camp Murray from Iraq, the soldiers who make up the cooks in the Guard sat at roughly 61 percent strength. And instead of cooking meals for soldiers, there was an overabundance of per diems and caterers, DeGroff said.

“When I started here, I saw we were catering everywhere, and said, ‘This is nuts.’ The people who are here want to cook. They want to do their job. This year we will serve almost \$4 million in groceries. And if we catered that it would be \$10 million to \$12 million. We are saving the National



Guard millions of dollars a year by cooking fresh food that they want to eat.”

Each dinner served by the Guard is supposed to fit within a \$4.24 basic daily food allowance. To show the challenges of that, the Guard invites area high schools and colleges to try their luck in making meals that fit to those guidelines.

“If I tell you that you have \$4.24 to buy groceries for dinner, you’ll look at me and tell me you can’t do it,” DeGroff said. “But when these students learn through serving 100, 200 or 1,000 people, they start to learn to purchase properly and begin to do things.”

Student Chantanaye Hudley of Lakes High School said that balancing the meal out with such a little budget proved hard.

“You need to make certain cuts,” added student Nadja Johnson of Lakes High School. “Instead of buying bigger things, you cut what you want in half to make budget.”

Professional restaurant chefs team with Guard soldiers to judge the students’ meals. Sometimes, ideas are gleaned to use in regular meals served to soldiers during training or a full-time kitchen that has been set up to serve soldiers in Yakima.

During a morning judging session, Command Sgt. Major Abby West of the Washington National Guard tried out food prepared by culinary students attending Bates Technical School, Lakes High School and Steilacoom High School. All three schools prepared cherry desserts.

“I hate cherries, but I think this is all really good!” West said.

With a plate of trout served with diced vegetables and mashed potatoes done in a gourmet style using a star-tipped piping bag, her eyes widened, “If I went into a dining facility and this was served to me, I’d expect candelabras on the table. Soldiers would lose their mind over this.”

One restaurant chef asked the Bates students, how would they serve the food in the field?

“Cook it to temp and hot hold it dry and then have a moist gravy or something to pour over it once we get on site,” the student replied, met with smiles from Guard soldiers nearby.

“This contest allows the students to cook and show off their cooking techniques, but it also integrates them into the business,” DeGroff said. “The teachers love it because it’s one thing to get a kid to cook and listen, it’s another to get them to understand the business end of it.”





WASHINGTON MILITARY DEPARTMENT

# EVERGREEN

MAGAZINE

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