



# The Shield

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TF Spartan

## Brothers in Arms: Virginia siblings serve together in Kuwait



The Johnsons are brothers who grew up together in Woodbridge, Virginia. Each enlisted in the Virginia Army National Guard right out of high school.

Robert, who is two years his brother's senior, chose to enlist because he knew that college was not the path he wanted to take. "I had no plans after high school. I wasn't going to college and was looking for something to do. A recruiter called me and offered me 20 grand to go to basic training and do two weeks a year and one weekend a month."

**Story by Staff Sgt. Marc Heaton  
Task Force Spartan Public Affairs**

For many service members and veterans, the military is often characterized as a "brotherhood" in which strong bonds are built through shared experiences.

For Sgt. 1st Class Robert Johnson, G32 Aviation noncommissioned officer-in-charge, Task Force Spartan, and Sgt. 1st Class Aaron Johnson, Air Mission Request noncommissioned officer-in-charge, Task Force Spartan, their "brotherhood" began long before either of them joined the military.

For Aaron, the timing was similar, but his reasons for enlisting were a bit different. It was his brother who recommended he join. "I was 17 and about to become a father. He [Robert] was like 'Hey, there's a recruiter's office there, they're giving out bonuses.' So, I joined. I was planning to go to college, but I was bagging groceries and needed to support my kid. So, I enlisted 5 days after my 18th birthday."

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### What's Inside



**Chief Warrant Officer 5**  
**John T. Anderson**  
**Task Force Spartan | 29 ID**  
**Command Chief Warrant Officer**



We have made it through Thanksgiving, Christmas, New Years, and Martin Luther King Jr's Holiday, and are now in the dead of winter. The holiday lights are gone, the decorations (hopefully) are all put away, and the fast-paced hustle and bustle has been replaced by the long and dark days and challenging weather. But please keep in mind that Valentine's Day will soon be upon us, which means that spring is just around the corner. Every day is getting a little bit longer and a little bit brighter, and soon March—with its solar equinox on the 20th this year—will arrive and bring with it the joys of spring. In a parallel thought, all of your Soldiers here are continuously getting brighter and better as well, and are starting to develop their own form of spring.

As Task Force Spartan's senior chief warrant officer, I have had the tremendous opportunity to watch, hear about, and learn of all of the great things that the Soldiers in this task force are doing, and I have experienced firsthand how much we have all learned about each other, this part of the world, humanity as a whole, and most importantly about ourselves. We have always been fortunate enough to have great talent here, but our skills have increased exponentially and we have all grown by leaps and bounds from where we all started prior to deploying. As with any other championship team that goes through the pre-season trials and tribulations of Tuckman's forming, storming, norming, and performing, Task Force Spartan has endured these inevitable yet necessary phases and now stands ready to make a run for the playoffs, or March Madness, or the Stanley Cup, or whichever sports metaphor you see as being the best in the world. That is what Task Force Spartan is becoming—the best in the world. Your Soldiers have faced the greatest challenges, put forth the greatest efforts, made the greatest progress, and set the highest standards that this operation has ever seen. We have seen a few setbacks, we have had a few penalties, and had a few rough calls that just didn't go our way, but being the champions that your Soldiers are, they have all played through it and collectively pushed harder and farther than anyone ever thought possible.

Being separated as we all are, it sometimes feels like we do not have the home field advantage, but with the letters (yes, I'm old), emails, whats apps, and texts from all of our loved ones back home, our crowd noise has drowned out the opposition and truly gives us the "home team" edge. I ask that you please continue to write, call, text, and encourage your Soldiers as they each finish out their season. Nothing feels better than to hear the cheers from home every time we make a first down, hit a three point jump shot, or score a goal, and taking that kind of momentum of feeling into the finals of this event will make us absolutely unbeatable. To all of the Soldiers in Task Force Spartan, I implore you to listen to the coaches; they have been in these championship-level events before. Stay focused on the basics: blocking, tackling, safety, teamwork, accountability, and leadership. We definitely do not want to lose a second half lead, choke in the third period, or fumble in the fourth quarter. Stay focused and let's bring the championship home for all of the people that we love. 29, Let's GO! 🏈

# The Shield



## TASK FORCE SPARTAN

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# U.S., Jordanian Soldiers build relationships through language

Story by Staff Sgt. Matt Lyman  
Task Force Spartan Public Affairs

Relationships are important, and intentional communication is essential to building relationships. Soldiers assigned to units composing Task Force Spartan (TFS) are committed to establishing communication with their Jordanian partners while serving at the Joint Training Center near Zarqa, Jordan.

These Soldiers are in a unique position, having Jordanian Armed Forces Soldiers as neighbors in arms and geography with the Jordan Armed Forces Language Institute (JAFLI) right up the road from the Joint Training Center.

JAFLI was founded in 1968 and teaches as many as 11 languages simultaneously to students across the rank spectrum. For nearly six decades the staff at the institute have blended theory with practice and offer English, French, Hebrew, Russian, Turkish, German, Italian, Spanish, Chinese, and Arabic for non-native speakers. These classes are presented in tiers from beginner to advanced, and there are refresher courses for non-commissioned officers, commissioned officers, and general officers. Successful completion of the course opens doors for Jordanian military personnel and is a requirement for exchange and training programs in the U.S.

The initial connection to JAFLI came to TFS from the U.S. embassy in Amman. This led to dialogue with the JAFLI staff and ultimately the commandant, Col. Dr. Selah Khalaileh, Royal Jordanian Armed Forces. Khalaileh saw and pursued the opportunity for his students to interact with native English, Spanish, and German speakers.

Khalaileh requested U.S. Soldiers to come to the institute and conduct conversational-style classes with his students. Each class had 12 students, and each class had one or two U.S. Soldiers to guide conversations in English. This particular cycle had 8 English classes, 1 Spanish class, and 1 German class.

“This engagement let us meet our new friends in a low

threat environment where helping each other was easy,” said Maj. Chris Holmes, Legal Advisor for the TFS Partner Nation Team, who helped facilitate the engagement. “The Jordanians are friendly, generous, and absolutely thrilled to work with Americans.”

The U.S. Soldiers who participated in the conversational English classes were afforded the opportunity to learn Arabic from the institute’s staff.

“The average American participant learned enough Arabic to be polite, and the Jordanians really appreciate it,” added Holmes.

The participants volunteered from the 29th Infantry Division, Area Support Group–Jordan, 142nd Field Artillery Brigade, the 1-124th Infantry Regiment, and 3-172nd Infantry Regiment.



The instructors would provide a topic to Holmes and he would disseminate it through the volunteers. The weekly topics were gleaned from the students, who had general questions about how Americans did everyday

things, and the questions were designed to help them pass their final conversational exams. The topics ranged from American weddings, social events, school, what it was like to be a U.S. Soldier, and a host of other topics that allowed for the students and Soldiers to learn about each other’s culture in a low stress, friendly environment.

“Language is fundamental to communication and communication is fundamental to relationships. From a strategic perspective, other nations, notably China and Russia, understand the importance of language and have reached out to or are already working with JAFLI,” said Holmes. “We should not squander this easy opportunity to help forge critical relationships and even friendships with a regional leader and ally.”

The Soldiers are currently preparing to carry on this relationship with the institute and their student body as they begin their 2022 academic year. 🌐

**from "BROTHERS" page 1**

"My mom was pretty supportive, of course nervous when I first joined. I think even more nervous when the second one joined. And then probably had a heart attack when our third brother joined," said Robert.

Though they do not have a history of military service in their family, that has not stopped them—or the third Johnson brother, who is a staff sergeant in the Virginia Army National Guard—from setting the bar high for themselves in their military careers.

For many siblings, there is a natural urge towards competitiveness or trying to set yourself apart from one another by doing different things. However, this is not true for the Johnsons, who have both followed very similar paths throughout their time in uniform.

Both enlisted into the communications field, both are graduates of the U.S. Army Airborne and Air Assault schools, and both have worked in Army aviation as full-time soldiers on

Title 10 orders with the Army National Guard.

"It's more about seeing each other succeed and less about competing," said Robert.

Previously, both have served in the same unit, but in different sections. Currently, both Aaron and Robert are deployed with the 29th Infantry Division as Task Force Spartan, working together in the G32 Aviation section. "[We] ...never deployed together before, minus our hand off in Afghanistan. This is the first time we have actually had a direct working relationship," said Robert.

Both Robert and Aaron have deployed previously. In 2015, Robert's unit took over for Aaron's unit. "In Afghanistan, his unit replaced my unit. We flew a couple flights together in Afghanistan, which was cool, during the two-week transition," said Aaron.

"Our transition was on D-Day, which was really cool. It was his last flight and my first flight. We got to see each

other, but it was very short-lived," said Robert.

Neither brother had any strong reservations about being deployed together. "We think very similarly, but have very different approaches to our work," said Aaron.

"We play off each other really well. We've been in the same realms for a lot of things," said Robert.

"Working in the same cell, my first concern was it was going to be difficult having to give direction to your little brother. But, it has actually turned out really well," said Robert.

The two have been able to work together as peers, not just as brothers. "We sit down and pass things and ideas back and forth. Even when things get heated, we're able to step outside and have a discussion. Most brothers don't really do that well, they just fight it out," said Robert. 🌐



**Left: Chaplain (MAJ) Delphoney Kargbo, Task Force Liberty chaplain, talks with an Afghan child and his mother recently at the community center at Camp As Sayliyah, Qatar. Above: An Afghan boy completes a math problem at the recently-opened education center at Camp As Sayliyah, Qatar, while other Afghan children look on.**

# Defeating the 'Stress Curve' to avoid accidents and get home safely

Story by 1st Lt. Vanessa Mery  
Task Force Spartan Safety Officer

“Complacency kills” isn’t just a common phrase to be tossed around lightly; it’s a warning to be heeded. We see it all the time—Soldiers putting in that extra time to review SOP’s and focusing on safe practices during “dangerous” activities, like loading a cannon or handling any equipment during live-fire exercises. However, it is when we conduct routine business that common and avoidable accidents take place. Everyone is hyper-vigilant during labeled “dangerous” training events, but after the exercise is over, Soldiers relax and start to let safety considerations slide one-by-one. The Stress Curve defined by the Yerkes-Dodson Law dictates that performance increases with physiological or mental arousal, but only up to a certain point. Performance decreases, leading to burnout, when levels of arousal or stress become too high.

When everyone is excited to go home, it is easy to overlook certain safety measures. By the time a unit is ready to leave, daily activities and battle rhythms have become second nature. This breeds overconfidence and complacency. A recent unit had 20% of their accidents occur in the last month of their deployment, ranging from tank accidents resulting in six-figure losses, to negligent discharges resulting in one Soldier requiring medical intervention—all accidents were preventable, had the proper safety protocols been enforced.

As Chief Warrant Officer 5 John T. Anderson, the 29th Infantry Division Command Chief Warrant Officer, noted, “safety begins the minute you turn on your equipment.” He emphasized that focus during the routine and mundane tasks must be at the forefront of all Soldiers minds. If

not, this is the time where we will see the most damaging mishaps leading to the loss of Soldiers and equipment. Our job is inherently dangerous due to the heavy machinery we work with on a daily basis. Risk Management is a living process, and we do it daily without any real thought. In the Army we must practice and master the process for the safety of our Soldiers and accomplishment of our missions.

The Army labels accidents as mishaps that are tiered from Class A (fatalities, permanent total disability, property damage greater than or equal to \$2.5 million) to Class E (property damage greater than or equal to \$5,000). Everything else is labeled a near-miss and tracked for trend analysis purposes. Task Force Spartan has been able to increase reporting of Safety incidents over 200% in the last 7 months through training and awareness, additional ADSO’s incorporated at lower echelons, and by simply getting the word out to commanders that reporting mishaps is not for assumption of blame. The military needs a culture shift to understand that higher reported numbers are indicative of an effective program, because they show trust in command and that a command is recognizing what they can fix (part of the assessment processes in risk management). We cannot fix what we do not know.

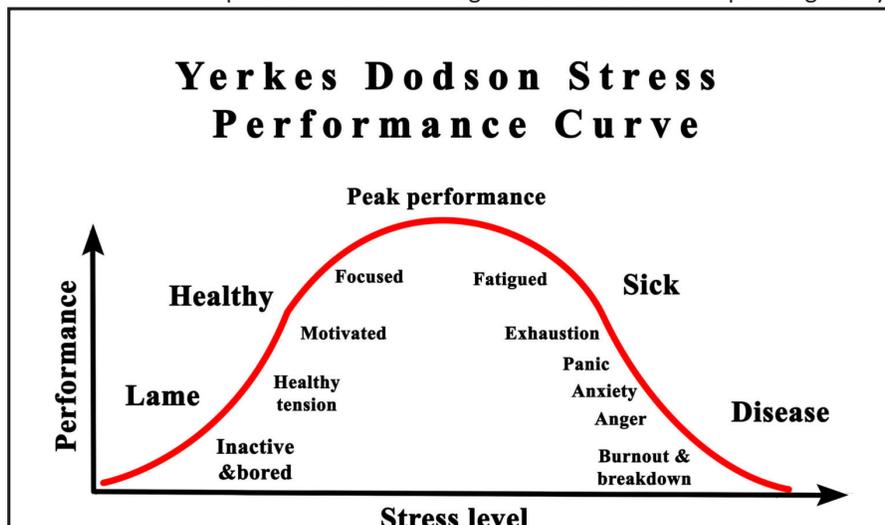
It is not enough to use buzz words or phrases like Risk Management—leaders

must actively carry it out by implementing the deliberate risk assessment process for all activities without exception. Taking a minute to discuss the “what-ifs” or “what could go wrong scenarios” is sometimes all it takes for it to resonate with your Soldiers. As stated in the Commanding General’s Safety Philosophy, “Regardless of grade, rank, or position, safety and loss prevention is everyone’s responsibility.”

Soldiers may become complacent with safety briefs, but they will remember what is personal to them and, as leaders, providing real examples of what could go wrong if safety is not considered should do the trick. Safety messages are a lot like cautionary tales or phrases that your parents would tell you while growing up – very repetitive and thought to be common sense (only to find out it became that way because of its repetitive nature). Messages such as “look both ways before crossing the street” or “it’s better to lose a minute in your life rather than your life in a minute” before attempting to run that red light stand out and last a lifetime. These are great examples leaders can provide during military safety briefings—stories that will resonate with our Soldiers.

As this deployment comes to a close, remember to put in that extra time towards the mundane tasks. Stretch before and during a workout, use proper weightlifting techniques, use ground guides when operating heavy machinery, ensure you

utilize SOPs and technical manuals while PMCS’ing, know your limits when it comes to team sports, and so forth. Don’t let the euphoria of being close to the finish line strip you of common sense. Ultimately, let’s return home safe and in one piece. 29, Let’s Go! 🇺🇸





Clockwise, from top left: Staff Sgt. Dawn Johnson evaluates a Soldier giving aid to a casualty during Medical Education and Demonstration of Individual Competence (MEDIC) training Jan. 11, 2022 at Camp Arifjan, Kuwait. Maj. Tom Wieworka and Capt. Hector Perez-Casillas pose for a photo with Kuwait Land Forces partners at the KLF 15th Brigade headquarters, Dec. 29, 2021. Pfc. Shiquies Branch sings the National Anthem Jan. 22, 2022 at an award ceremony for Soldiers leaving theater for the 35th Inf. Div. culminating training exercise. Col. Carlos Hopkins speaks at the Judge Advocate General Symposium held at Kuwait Land Forces headquarters Dec. 19, 2021.



Clockwise, from top left: (L-R) Lt. Col. Charles Lee, Lt. Col. Wilson Mustian, Air Force Maj. Christopher Simmons, and Maj. John Parson serve as panelists during the Judge Advocate General Symposium at Kuwait Land Forces headquarters Dec. 19, 2021. Maj. Gen. John Rhodes presents the Meritorious Service Medal certificate to Capt. David Buchanan during an award ceremony at Camp Arifjan, Kuwait, Jan. 22, 2022. A Soldier inserts an IV needle into a mannequin arm during Medical Education and Demonstration of Individual Competence (MEDIC) training Jan. 11, 2022 at Camp Arifjan, Kuwait. Sgt. Shaina English (left), Sgt. Jessica Ighnat (right center), and Staff Sgt. Sharon Jacobson (right), pose with an Altomooch Kuwaiti Sports Club competitor at Boulevard Park in Salmiya, Kuwait, Jan. 22, 2022. Maj. Gen. John Rhodes visits Kuwait Land Forces Soldiers of 15th Brigade to observe training at their headquarters, Dec. 29, 2021.



## 29th ID Promotions

Please congratulate the following Soldiers on their promotions:

- Sgt. Damion Washington
- Master Sgt. Craig Schmid
- Master Sgt. Michelle Thompson

# Just Keep Living



**By Chaplain (MAJ) Jonathan Goldwire  
Task Force Spartan-Jordan**

My mom and stepdad pulled up into the driveway of my home and I rushed outside to greet them. I grabbed some of their bags to help them and my mom, as independent as she is, went walking up the hill towards my home with her own bags in hand. I followed right behind her and as we went up she was expressing relief about having endured the long car ride. As we walked up this short hill her breathing was kind of labored and as we made it to my front steps, she paused- completely exhausted. She let out a sigh of relief and I laughed. I thought to

myself that this short hill, a hill which I've walked up and down hundreds of times at this point coming in and out of my house, should not have tired her out that fast.

I laughed. She laughed. Then she said some timeless words that I'd heard her share with me for almost half of my life. Words that had been passed down to her.

"Son," she said, "just keep on living."

Over the years I had heard those same words spoken by her and my elders before. I heard them when I was being

an arrogant, know-it-all teenager. They were uttered to me when I didn't understand why life had delivered me a disappointment. Those words comforted me when I was in agony and grieving and they sustained me when I needed encouragement during the times when I doubted myself. The older I get the more I appreciate hearing those words, shared through the lens of others who have paved a way for me. The elders I heard utter those words were able to speak them because they had witnessed their timeless wisdom. They knew bad times don't last always, but neither did the good ones, so I had to keep persevering through whatever obstacle in life I had to face.

As we begin to reintegrate into our lives back home it is my hope that we are able to find ourselves surrounded by people who are able to encourage us to just "keep living" and that we remember the sacrifices of those who make life worth living. These are the people that should continuously remind and encourage us throughout life that we are loved, valued, and unique. And for these reasons, we keep living. These are the people who have made tremendous sacrifices during our deployment so that we could concentrate on our mission. Reintegration will come with its own challenges, but there will also be incredible opportunities for life to flourish.

So, as we begin our return home I wanted to share with you these same timeless words that have been both a source of inspiration and rebuke when I stood at the threshold of defining moments in life. There are times that life is going to hurt, but it's meant to be felt, so just keep living. 🌍