

# DAKOTA PACK

MAGAZINE OF THE SOUTH DAKOTA ARMY AND AIR NATIONAL GUARD • SPRING 2022

## SOLDIERS, NCOs COMPETE FOR BEST WARRIOR TITLE

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# South Dakota NATIONAL GUARD



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The Adjutant General

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Senior Enlisted Leader

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**Submissions:** Print and photo submissions of general interest to members of the SDNG, their families, civilian employees, veterans and retirees are invited and encouraged. Please send article and photos with name, phone number, e-mail, and comments to: [ng.sd.sdarng.list.pao@army.mil](mailto:ng.sd.sdarng.list.pao@army.mil), 605.737.6978. Submissions are subject to editing. Electronic submissions are preferred and digital photos should be at least 300 dpi.

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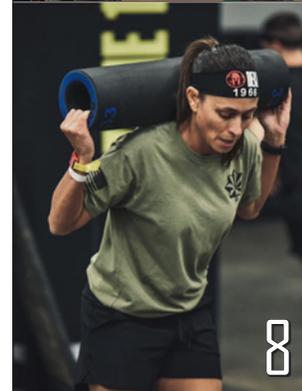


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## On the Cover

Spc., Jedidiah Vissia, 115th Signal Company, identifies a chemical during the South Dakota Army National Guard 2022 Best Warrior Competition at West Camp Rapid in Rapid City, Nov. 6, 2021. (Photo by Pfc. BreAnna Paul)

# Message from the SDNG Adjutant General

“Good, better best, never let it rest, until you good is better and your better best.”

I wish I could take credit for this quote, but I cannot. Numerous people over history have claimed it as their own, so many it is impossible to truly attribute it to any one wise person. What I can tell you, is this quote has had a significant impact on the way I attempt to live my life. I have found it applicable to my career, my relationships with others and my views of the world. In the next few sections, I will try to explain how we can utilize this approach in the SDNG.

**LEADERSHIP** – Every single member of the SDNG is a leader. From the newest member to the most senior, all of us are called upon to lead in some capacity. It is important for leaders to acknowledge we will never achieve perfection as a leader, we must continually desire to grow.

Some growth will come through experience, some through maturity, some through successes and some through failures. Some must come from our commitment to want to grow as a leader, to make our good better. Author Simon Sinek stated, “There are leaders and there are those who lead. Leaders hold a position of power, but those who lead, inspire us.” Which will you be?

**TRAINING** – By nature of being in the National Guard, we have a very finite amount of time we get to train with our Soldiers and Airmen. It is essential we don't waste one single minute of that time. I could write pages of thoughts on this subject, but instead, will simply say it this way. If you and your Soldiers/Airmen are called in to service today, have you as a leader done everything you can do to insure your members are fully ready to fight and survive the mission they are called to do?

If you as a leader, ever have to visit the family of one of your injured or fallen teammates, can you look them in the eye and tell them you did your job to prepare them? Have you as a member done everything you can do to insure you are ready? Are your affairs in order? Is your family ready and provided for?

## REGULATIONS, POLICY, PRACTICES, HABITS

– We in the military are heavily influenced by regulations, policy, practices and habits. Each of these are critical to the success and wellbeing of our organization and our members. What is just as important is that we never become so reliant on them, we fail to test them, to validate them and be sure they are the right and best way.

We operate in a very dynamic environment in the SDNG and in our civilian lives. “We have always done it this way,” should not be our default position. We should always be asking ourselves if there is a better way we can accomplish our missions and take care of our members.

**SAFETY** – Our most valuable resource is our people. We are fortunate and blessed to have each and every member. Every member is someone's son or daughter, wife or husband, brother or sister. We owe it to our members and to their families to always strive to protect them. We as an organization continue to have vehicle and workplace safety incidents. We continue to have verbal and/or physical abuse occur. We continue to have incidents of sexual assault occur. One incident is too many. One abuse is too many. One assault is too many. We have many good programs and practices in place to address these areas and some may argue we are better than before, but our good is not good enough and our better is not best. We can and must do better by our members.

I leave you with one last quote. “Complacency is the enemy of excellence.” Don't let the enemy win in the SDNG. Thank you for yours and your families service to our state and nation.



Sincerely,

*Jeffrey P. Marlette*

Maj. Gen. Jeffrey P. Marlette  
The Adjutant General

# Message from the Senior Enlisted Leader

This past November the South Dakota Army National Guard completed its annual Best Warrior Competition. After over two decades of using the BWC to determine our top NCOs and enlisted Soldiers, this next year we will see the Best Squad Competition taking the forefront, as the Army wants to focus on team building.

This past month, Sergeant Major of the Army Michael Grinston, announced a new competition, which will kick off in September 2022 and will replace the Best Warrior. His plan is to announce the winning squad during October's Association of the United States Army, conference. Grinston stated that "For over two years, we have talked about the importance of building cohesive teams that are highly trained, disciplined and fit, now it's time to measure ourselves against that standard."

The Best Warrior Competition consisted of physical fitness events, marksmanship, medical and warrior tasks, written exams and boards. The Best Squad Competition will consist of events that will be team oriented. Tasks like conducting a squad attack, in which part of the squad fires on a target, while another element flanks and assaults it. The intent is for twelve teams to compete at the national competition, including one from the Army Reserve and National Guard.

The new competition will not use traditional infantry squads, which have two teams of four Soldiers, with each of those teams led by a noncommissioned officer and then a squad leader in charge of those two NCOs. Instead, the competition will use five-person squads, with two NCOs in charge of three junior troops. A sergeant first class or staff sergeant will lead; the squad will also have a sergeant or a corporal as team leader, along with three junior enlisted Soldiers. Though staff sergeants traditionally lead infantry squads, the higher rank has been authorized for units that are typically led by an E-7.

Despite there being no formal Best Warrior Competition at the region and National level, Soldiers in the new squad event will still be evaluated individually. The best performing individual Soldier and noncommissioned officer will be announced at AUSA. Those two Soldiers may come from a squad that did not win the Best Squad title.

"This is My Squad" initiative has been Grinston's focus as the Army's senior enlisted leader. "This is My Squad" is designed to develop cohesion in small unit operations. NCOs in squads have the most impact on the Army's junior Soldiers. To empower leaders in lower levels is critical to the basic functions of the service -- the idea of being strong squads means a strong Army.

Our Best Warriors from the South Dakota Army National Guard will compete 15-21 May in the Region 6 Best Warrior Competition in Wyoming. Region 6 winners will go on to compete at the Army National Guard Best Warrior Competition in Tennessee this summer. The top performing Soldiers will be selected (formed into a squad) and will compete in the all Army Best Squad Competition in September. This was the best course of action this year for all Army National Guard units.

There will be more discussion in the next several months to see how the Best Squad Competition evolves and what it looks like for the South Dakota Army National Guard and the Army National Guard. I will keep everyone informed about these changes.

We have talked about "This is My Squad" the past two years. SMA Grinston has taken this to the next level with the Best Squad Competition. This is My Squad urges leaders to get to know their Soldiers and their families, and what resources those Soldiers might need, whether that's specific training for military skills or mental health care. It's about those small groups of Soldiers who really know and care about each other and hold each other to a high standard of proficiency, discipline, fitness and morality. Take care of our Guard Family! Thanks for all that you do!



Sincerely,

*Pat Couser*

Command Sgt. Maj. Pat Couser  
Senior Enlisted Leader



# Pardy assumes duties as assistant adjutant general

By SDNG Public Affairs Office

RAPID CITY – Brig. Gen. Patrick Pardy assumed duties as the new assistant adjutant general of the South Dakota Army National Guard during a change of authority ceremony at Camp Rapid, Dec. 4.

Pardy assumed responsibilities from Brig. Gen. Michael Oster who served in the position since October 2019. Oster will serve in Pardy's previous assignment as land component commander for Joint Force Headquarters.



**Brig. Gen. Patrick Pardy**

Pardy is now the senior advisor to the South Dakota National Guard Adjutant General, Maj. Gen. Jeff Marlette, for strategic planning, strength management, troop readiness and mobilization support of the state's nearly 3,100 Army National Guard Soldiers.

"I thank Brig. Gen. Oster for the outstanding job he has done these last several years. He has taken on some big initiatives and led the force at a time that has been very challenging," Marlette said during the ceremony. "We all know what an outstanding leader Brig. Gen. Pardy is and we are handing over this role to a truly competent, capable and excellent leader, and he will do great things."

"Thank you Maj. Gen. Marlette for your trust and confidence in me and thank you Brig. Gen. Oster for all the great things you have done. You have set us up for success and we are going to continue to follow that path," Pardy said. "No one gets here without great Soldiers and staff, teammates, peers, and superiors, and I feel fortunate to continue to work with such great people in this organization."

"It's been a privilege and honor to serve in this organization and in this position," Oster said. "There is no better leader I have worked with who is more committed to excellence and taking care of Soldiers than Brig. Gen. Pardy. I wish him the best, and I know he will take things to the next level and continue to support our Soldiers."

Pardy also serves in a dual-position assignment as the deputy to the commanding general—Army National Guard for the U.S. Army Maneuver Support Center of Excellence at Fort Leonard Wood, Missouri, advising MSCoE Commander Maj. Gen. James Bonner on National Guard capabilities, training and readiness.

Pardy has 35 years of military service, first enlisting as a combat engineer in 1986. In 1992, he received his commission as an engineer officer through the University of South Dakota ROTC program.

Throughout his career, Pardy served in a variety of command and staff positions, such as engineer platoon leader and intelligence and operations officer positions at the battalion, brigade and state levels. His command assignments include Company B, 153rd Engineer Battalion, 153rd Engineer Battalion, and 196th Maneuver Enhancement Brigade.

He has served on two combat deployments to Afghanistan in support of Operation Enduring Freedom.

Pardy holds a Bachelor of Science degree and Juris Doctorate degree from the University of South Dakota, and a master's degree in strategic studies from the U.S. Army War College. In his civilian career, Pardy serves as a circuit judge in South Dakota's Third Judicial Circuit in Madison.



(Photo by Staff Sgt. Karen Tucker)

**Maj. Gen. Jeff Marlette, left, adjutant general of the South Dakota National Guard, passes the unit colors to Brig. Gen. Patrick Pardy, incoming assistant adjutant general of the South Dakota Army National Guard, during a change of authority ceremony in Rapid City, Dec. 4, 2021.**



(Photo by Staff Sgt. Karen Tucker)

**Brig. Gen. Patrick Pardy, incoming assistant adjutant general of the South Dakota Army National Guard, speaks to Joint Force Headquarters Soldiers during change of authority ceremony in Rapid City, Dec. 4, 2021.**

# Rapid City Central H.S. JROTC program receives national award

By Staff Sgt. Dustin Jordan - SDNG Public Affairs Office

RAPID CITY – The Rapid City Central High School Junior Reserve Officer Training Corps received the 2021 Fulcrum Shield Award during a ceremony at Camp Rapid, Dec. 8, for having the top youth drug prevention program nationally.

The South Dakota Army National Guard's Counterdrug Substance Abuse Program nominated the JROTC program for the award for their partnership in community-based, anti-drug and substance abuse messaging.

The Fulcrum Shield Award is presented by the Office of the Deputy Assistant Secretary of Defense for Counter-Narcotics to recognize youth organizations affiliated with the military that have made recognizable strides in spreading the anti-drug message throughout their communities.

Army JROTC programs have existed since 1916 and today are in more than 1,700 schools around the country. Its mission is to motivate young people to become better citizens through classes and active involvement in community service activities. The Central High School JROTC program began in 1995.

"It's truly an honor to receive the Fulcrum Shield Award," said Kristi Palmer, with the SDARNG Counterdrug Substance Abuse Program. "This award validates all of our hard work through our community partnerships and the JROTC. Being recognized with the top youth drug prevention program in the nation is a big deal!"

The award, first presented in 2002, is named in honor of five military personnel from Fort Bliss, Texas, who were killed in an aircraft accident in 1999 while on a counter-drug reconnaissance mission in Columbia.

A cadet chain of command and staff lead the JROTC program at CHS. Students who demonstrate commitment, drive, and leadership manage the organization and select community service activities to support.

Central High School JROTC has partnered with the SDARNG Red Ribbon Committee since 1996 to show the Red Ribbon Week Spirit in Rapid City schools and the community. During RRW, JROTC



(Photo by Staff Sgt. Dustin Jordan)

**Maj. Gen. Jeff Marlette, South Dakota National Guard adjutant general, addresses Rapid City Central High School JROTC cadets during the presentation of the 2021 Fulcrum Shield Award in Rapid City, Dec. 8, 2021.**



(Photo by Staff Sgt. Dustin Jordan)

**Cadets from the Central High School Junior Reserve Officer Training Corps, sponsored by the South Dakota Army National Guard's Army Substance Abuse Program, receive the 2021 Fulcrum Shield Award during a ceremony in Rapid City, Dec. 8, 2021**

volunteers to help with events to keep the mission a success.

"The South Dakota National Guard has a history of working with the Central High School JROTC during Red Ribbon Week and throughout the school year," said Palmer. "The JROTC cadets provide a drill team ceremony at our RRW kick-off event and tie the ribbons on the presidents (statues) in downtown Rapid City. The cadets have marched in the RRW parade, provided judges for our RRW billboard contest, and supported our counterdrug team with climbing wall mission support."

Central High School JROTC has grown in attendance since 1995. The first year of the program there were 90 cadets enrolled in the program. That number peaked in 2011 to 220 cadets and currently averages 150 cadets in the program.

The JROTC program started to perform small community service projects at the beginning of the program and currently performs over 1,000 hours of community service projects or services to help the community.

The JROTC has grown in their partnership with the SDARNG over the years. The addition of their volunteer time with RRW activities has had huge impacts on raising the awareness of drug prevention in the community.

"Since coming to the program, I've seen our relationship with the SDARNG grow tremendously," said 1st Sgt. Ryan Wheele, JROTC senior instructor. "Having this strong partnership has allowed us to integrate many resources and capabilities of the SDARNG into our training opportunities for cadets."

The cadets expanded their drug prevention involvement over the years to supplement the message by selecting the SDARNG Counterdrug program.

"While many of the benefits of our partnership with the SDARNG are tangible, such as access to facilities, training resources, etc., others such as mentorship, professional role modeling, and sharing the desire to serve offer many unique experiences and interactions for our cadets that typical high school students don't have access to," said Wheele. "Having these first-hand experiences is likely a driving factor in the propensity to serve among our senior cadets, as many choose military service as their primary post-secondary option. Ultimately, the SDARNG helps bring our program to life in a way that would otherwise not be possible, and we are very thankful for their service and continued support."

# SD Army National Guard names Soldier, NCO of the Year

By Pfc. BreAnna Paul – 129th Mobile Public Affairs Detachment

RAPID CITY – The South Dakota Army National Guard selected four enlisted Soldiers and six non-commissioned officers to compete in the state’s Best Warrior Competition in Rapid City, Nov. 5-7, to identify the next Soldier and Non-Commissioned Officer of the Year, respectively.

After the three-day competition, Staff Sgt. Jordan Johnson, a member with the Joint Force Headquarters, was named the SDARNG’s Non-Commissioned Officer of the Year. Spc. Jedidiah Vissia, a member with the 115th Signal Company, was named the SDARNG Soldier of the Year.

“The Best Warrior Competition is a chance for the best Soldiers from each individual unit to come together here at Camp Rapid and show us their skills and it’s their time to shine,” said Sgt. Maj. Michael Wilkening, the human resources equal opportunity sergeant major with the Joint Force Headquarters. “They will get to come out and try to compete and do the best they can.”

The BWC challenges Soldiers academically, mentally, physically and technically using multiple tasks focused on key areas.

“They’re going to be tired,” said Wilkening. “They’re going to be to the point where they’re going to be under some stress. Many of the same things that they may see in a real life job, whatever it is, they’re doing that day. They will be able to draw upon what they learn here and actually be able to take that forward to whatever it is they do on the civilian side.”

The competition and the training involved preparing for it provides the competitors not only with the opportunity to improve themselves, but also to improve their peers and subordinates as well.

“We come out here for about three days and we test them to the maximum of their ability, seeing where all their potential is at,” said Command Sgt. Maj. Patrick Couser, the senior enlisted leader of the South Dakota National Guard. “We want to get one NCO and one enlisted member to shine above everybody else, our best warriors. They will go on to our regional competition.”

Johnson and Vissia will advance to the Region 6 Best Warrior Competition, which is scheduled to be held in May 2022 at Camp Guernsey, Wyoming. They will face competitors from Alaska, Idaho, Montana, North Dakota, Oregon, Washington and Wyoming.

The NCO of the Year runner-up/alternate was Staff Sgt. Matthew Bullis, Forward Support Company, 109th Engineer Battalion, and the Soldier of the Year runner-up/alternate was Spc. Connor Ullrich, Headquarters Company, 153rd Engineer Battalion.



(Photo by Pfc. BreAnna Paul)

Staff Sgt. Jordan Johnson, Joint Force Headquarters, climbs down an obstacle during the Best Warrior Competition in Rapid City, Nov. 6, 2021.



(Photo by Pfc. BreAnna Paul)

Spc. Connor Ullrich, Headquarters Company, 153rd Engineer Battalion, performs preventive maintenance checks and services on a Humvee during the Best Warrior Competition in Rapid City, Nov. 6, 2021.



(Photo by Pfc. BreAnna Paul)

From left to right: Col. Scott Petrik, Chief of Staff of the SDARNG; Spc. Jedidiah Vissia, SDARNG Soldier of the Year; Spc. Connor Ullrich, runner-up SDARNG Soldier of the Year; Staff Sgt. Matthew Bullis, runner-up Non-Commissioned Officer of the Year; Staff Sgt. Jordan Johnson, Non-Commissioned Officer of the Year; Command Sgt. Maj. Patrick Couser, senior enlisted leader of the SDNG.



(Photo by Pfc. BreAnna Paul)

Sgt. Wade Lockhart, Recruiting and Retention Battalion, shoots a M320 Grenade Launcher during the Best Warrior Competition in Rapid City, Nov. 6, 2021.

# Warrant officer candidates continue long-standing tradition

By SDNG Public Affairs Office

Members of South Dakota Army National Guard's Warrant Officer Candidate School class 22-001 gathered to present their class song and sign to the state command chief warrant officer, Feb. 5, at Fort Meade.

The song and sign presentation is a tradition with the Warrant Officer Cohort and builds esprit de corps within the class and facilitate communication among the candidates.

"The sign and song presentation is a long-standing tradition in Warrant Officer Candidate School, both at Fort Rucker and at Regional Training Institutes around the country," said Chief Warrant Officer 3 Kylan Harrington, 196th Regional Training Institute senior training, advising and counseling officer. "It signifies the class coming together and taking pride in their actions as a team as opposed to being individuals."

The class worked together throughout the course to come up with a unique sign and song that depicts the classes journey together.

"The class song is put together by the class song officer and is presented by the class to the state command chief warrant officer," said Warrant Officer Candidate Kayla Johnston. "The sign depicts the class' journey together, made up of all of the candidates' names and their future branches as well as the class motto and mascot. If both are approved by the state command chief warrant officer, the class will then receive their colors, ours is gold."

Warrant Officer Candidate School is a truly unique school for a select group of individuals. Warrant officers make up only three percent of the total Army force.

"Warrant officers currently span 17 different Army branches and 45 warrant officer specialties," said Harrington. "The Warrant Officer Cohort is unique in that our network is vast but very close at the same time. If a warrant officer ever needs anything pertaining to another career field or specialty, they know they can pick up the phone and call another warrant in that MOS (job specialty) and get the help they need immediately. The camaraderie among the cohort is amazing."

Warrant officers are experts in their field and advise their units on every aspect of the subject area they have mastered over their military career.

Warrant officers are special because they are technical experts in their field, offering



(Photo by Staff Sgt. Dustin Jordan)

South Dakota Army National Guard candidates from Warrant Officer Candidate School class 22-001 present their class sign to Chief Warrant Officer 5 Kenneth J. Schoenfelder, state command chief warrant Officer, during the class sign and song ceremony at Fort Meade, Feb. 5.

their subject matter expertise to their leaders, peers, and subordinates alike," said Johnston.

"The Warrant Officer Cohort is a small, specialized group of individuals who coach, mentor, and develop in their specialty field.

**"It signifies the class coming together and taking pride in their actions as a team as opposed to being individuals."**

— Chief Warrant Officer 3 Kylan Harrington

"If someone is an expert in their field as an enlisted member, and others look to them for leadership, advising, and mentoring, the warrant officer path is definitely something they should consider," Johnston continued.

"Becoming a warrant officer was the best decision I ever made in my career," added Harrington. "It's difficult to think about giving up your hard-earned NCO stripes, but making

the decision to become a warrant officer allows you to become a subject matter expert in your career field while still mentoring the Soldiers and NCOs that you work with."

Becoming a warrant officer can expand a Soldier's opportunities professionally. They could potentially become a member of an elite group of experts, developing themselves and leading others. "Many warrant officers attend specialty schools in their career fields which, in turn, increases civilian job opportunities," said Harrington. "Attending Warrant Officer Candidate School will challenge you physically and mentally, but you grow tremendously as a leader and as a Soldier in the Guard during your time there."

If any Soldier is considering the warrant officer career path, Harrington says they shouldn't hesitate to reach out. "We are happy to answer any questions or concerns you might have," she said.

For more information on becoming a warrant officer, contact Chief Warrant Officer 4 Brenda Laurenti at (605) 737-6230 or [brenda.l.laurenti2.mil@army.mil](mailto:brenda.l.laurenti2.mil@army.mil).

# 5 SD Guard Soldiers named to NGB All Guard Endurance Team

By SDNG Public Affairs Office

AUSTIN, Texas. – Five South Dakota Army National Guard Soldiers were named to the National Guard Bureau's All Guard Endurance Team after competing among 120 National Guard Soldiers and Airmen from 35 U.S. states and territories. The Soldiers competed in time trials in Austin, Texas, Jan. 15, to earn a spot on the male and female teams.

Sgt. Bailey Ruff, Staff Sgt. Lucas Scott, Sgt. 1st Class Paul Hoffman, Capt. Joel Engle, and Lt. Col. Tracy Graves made the team after completing a variety of exercises and running that tested their strength and endurance. Also participating in the competition included Command Sgt. Maj. Josh Mannel.

As All Guard Endurance Team members, the Soldiers are now eligible to compete and represent the National Guard for the next two years before being required to requalify. The team participates in about four endurance events annually.

For Ruff, Scott and Hoffman, this is the second straight time making the team since its inaugural year in 2020.

"This event is so much fun and really encompasses the fitness level that every Soldier should be at," said Hoffman, SDARNG Endurance Team state coordinator. "These events are very coordinated, very organized and a lot of fun. The team embodies a physical fitness attitude and the unwillingness to quit no matter what obstacle is put in front of them."

The All Guard Endurance Team began as an idea to expand the existing National Guard Marathon Program, while bolstering the National Guard Retention Program, by instilling physical fitness, self-discipline, and esprit de corps among National Guard members from all 50 states, three U.S. territories and the District of Columbia.

The competition included a variety of endurance challenges, or stations, and running in between. The stations included a reverse lunge, 500 meter row, 24 inch box jump, medicine ball sit-up, 500 meter SkiErg, 100 meter farmer's carry, 25 kilometer Cal air bike, dead/slam ball shoulder over, 100 meter tank push/pull and RAM burpees.

"In addition to the 10 endurance stations, the competitors also had to run 500 meters between each of them. The whole event was an equivalent distance of running a 5K," said Graves, who tried out for her first time to make the female team.

For many of the competitors, the event was not only to earn a spot on the team, but to show themselves what they can do.

"I was not heading into this competition expecting to make the team," Graves said. "I was planning on coming here to support many of the other Soldiers competing. However, I decided since I was already going to be here, I might as well train up and participate. I surprised myself what I could do and I made the team."

A guest speaker at the event also echoed that sentiment to all the competitors.

"Really, what this competition showed me regardless of your fitness level ... you're competing against yourself. ... You're showing excellence and going above and beyond," said Brig. Gen. Michael Oster, the assistant adjutant general for the South Dakota Army National Guard. Oster, who was the keynote speaker at the awards ceremony, said the competition "makes you feel good about who you are and it makes you feel good about what you do."

Hoffman said being a part of an endurance team requires more than just being physically fit, it also requires having a strong mental attitude.

"There are many different events, so it doesn't take just one thing to

compete – don't be scared to get dirty – to compete you must have an overall mindset of not giving up," Hoffman said. "It's an environment meant for very specific people but, it's always fun and it's always educational"

To be on the state team, Soldiers must compete in a state qualification event. If Soldiers are interested in knowing more about the SDARNG Endurance Team, please contact the state coordinator, Sgt. 1st Class Paul Hoffman at 605-230-0421 or paul.p.hoffman.mil@army.mil.



Lt. Col. Tracy Graves conducts reverse lunges while competing at the National Guard Bureau's All Guard Endurance Team time trials in Austin, Texas, Jan. 15.



Sgt. Bailey Ruff conducts medicine ball sit-ups while competing at the National Guard Bureau's All Guard Endurance Team time trials in Austin, Texas, Jan. 15.

# Suriname, SD National Guard leaders reinforce partnership

By Sgt. 1st Class Michael Beck - 129th Mobile Public Affairs Detachment



(Photo by Sgt. 1st Class Michael Beck)

**South Dakota National Guard and Suriname Defense Force leaders stand together during a distinguished leaders visit to Paramaribo, Suriname, Nov. 24, 2021. Senior leaders from the SDNG visited the Republic of Suriname, South Dakota's State Partnership Program nation, to reinforce the partnership between the SDNG and Suriname military while supporting their 46th year of independence at National Day.**

PARAMARIBO, Suriname - Senior leaders from the South Dakota National Guard visited the Republic of Suriname, South Dakota's State Partnership Program nation, Nov. 22 through 26, to reinforce the partnership between the SDNG and Suriname military while supporting their 46th year of independence at their National Day celebration.

South Dakota and Suriname, in coordination with U.S. Southern Command, established a successful security cooperation relationship in 2006 under the National Guard Bureau's State Partnership Program. Since then, numerous exchanges have taken place between the SDNG and Suriname's Defense Forces to share experiences and best practices in a variety of military training and topics.

Maj. Gen. Jeffrey Marlette, the adjutant general of the SDNG, along with Brig. Gen. Ed Vanderwolde, director of the joint staff, and Command Sgt. Maj. Patrick Couser, senior enlisted leader began the week at the Ministry of Defense in Paramaribo.

Meeting with Suriname's Minister of Defense Krishnakoemarie Mathoera, Col. Henri van Axel Dongen, commander of the Suriname Defense Forces and the commanders of Suriname's military branches, Marlette discussed the success of the 15-year partnership and future exchanges and projects.

"I am very optimistic about what the future holds for the Suriname-South Dakota partnership," Marlette said. "We continue to find new and meaningful ways to work together to help each of our organizations

learn and grow through this partnership. Although geographically very different, we share many common missions, challenges and goals for our organizations."

This trip also included visits to the Ministry of Education, Col. Jerry Slijngard, the head of Suriname's National Coordination Center for Disaster Relief and his senior staff, as well as with senior enlisted leaders of the Surinamese militaries.

Over the past 15 years, the two parties have conducted nearly 170 engagement activities in support of USSOUTHCOM cooperation objectives with Suriname, including countering transnational criminal and violent extremist organizations, reinforcing humanitarian assistance and disasters response capabilities, promoting military professional development, enhancing regional access and security sector reform.

In the senior enlisted leaders meeting, Command Sgt. Maj. Couser discussed the importance of diversifying membership in the military while discussing the increase in women enlisting in the Surinamese Army.

"We encourage (diversity) to gain perspective," said Couser. "We learn how we can best help each other, how we can learn from you, and you from us. We build strength by treating everyone with dignity and trust."

SDNG senior leaders were also honored guests at Suriname's National Day Parade, celebrating the country's 1975 independence from the Netherlands, as well as a meal with Suriname's president, Chan Santokhi.

# Empowering Airmen to innovate leads to money and time savings

By Master Sgt. Duane Duimstra - 114th Fighter Wing Public Affairs

By empowering Airmen to innovate, the 114th Maintenance Squadron structural repair shop found a solution to painting aircraft parts, one of their most time consuming tasks, to save time and money.

“What could be more innovative for our shop than getting a portable paint booth for painting wings all the time?” said Tech Sgt. Tyler Martin, 114th Maintenance Squadron Structural Repair technician.

The portable paint booth was acquired after hours of research to find a manufacturer able to build a booth size needed to paint large F-16C parts such as the wings and meet strict safety specifications and standards.

“Initially we submitted a NGB Innovation Funds Request but unfortunately it wasn’t granted. Our next step was to go through base contracting and that is the route in which we bought the booth at the end of the last fiscal year,” said Martin.

Hours of man hours have been saved since obtaining the portable paint booth. Repainting a wing now only takes four working days instead of six.

“It took our shop that long because we had to build a make-shift paint booth out of plastic sheeting,” said Martin.

In addition to saving time, the portable paint booth has saved the wing money by reducing hazardous waste disposal by 75%. This equals to about \$1200.00 in hazardous waste disposal costs per aircraft wing painted.

This has a significant impact on 114th Fighter Wing readiness by the hours saved on finishing a big paint job safely, correctly, and on time.

“Getting things done the right way, ahead of schedule is always a great feeling,” said Martin.



(Photo by Master Sgt. Duane Dimstra)

An f-16 wing dries after being painted in a portable paint booth assembled by the 114th Fighter Wing Repair Shop. The portable paint booth has saved the wing money and time for structural repair Airmen.

# 2021 Red Ribbon week poster contest winners

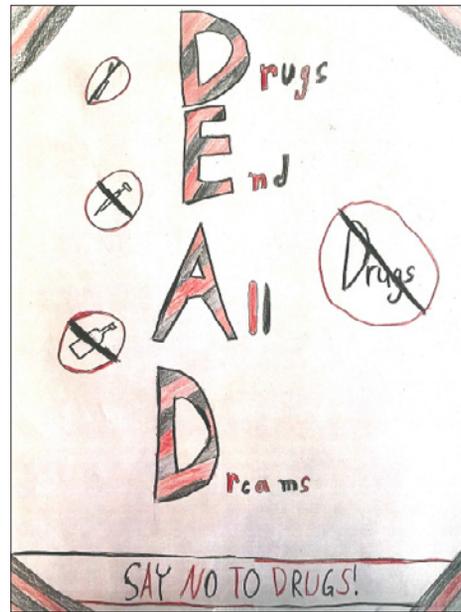
Congratulations to the winners and participants of the 2021 Red Ribbon Week poster contest. Jackson Hestermann (9-years old and younger category) and Jane Johnson (10-years old and over category) were this year’s winners. The theme for this year’s Red Ribbon Week was “Drug Free. Looks Like Me.” Thank you to all the participants!

**9-YEARS OLD AND UNDER:**

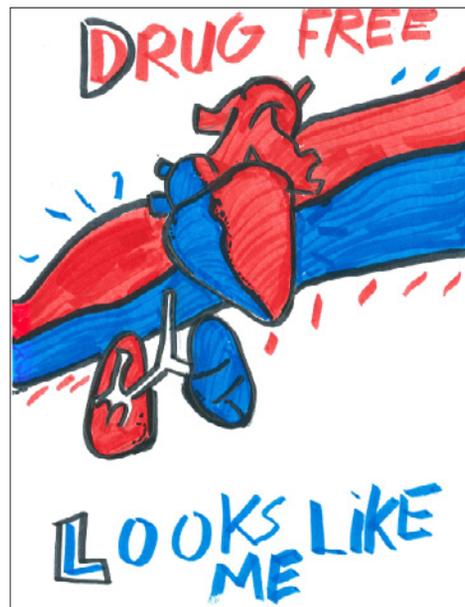
- 1st place: Jackson Hestermann
- 2nd place: Merica Watkins
- 3rd place: Quinn Sietsema

**10-YEARS OLD AND OVER:**

- 1st place: Jane Johnson
- 2nd place: KJ Callies
- 3rd place: Viona Sietsema



Jackson Hestermann



Jane Johnson

# 235th Military Police Company deploys to Cuba

By SDNG Public Affairs Office

RAPID CITY – About 110 members of the South Dakota National Guard's 235th Military Police Company were honored during a deployment ceremony at the The Monument's Fine Arts Theatre in Rapid City, Jan. 5, as the unit departs for a year-long federal deployment to Cuba.

Hundreds of family members, friends and community supporters came out to bid farewell to the Rapid City and Sioux Falls-based unit as they depart on their mission to provide detention operations support to Joint Task Force Guantanamo.

"This is the moment we have been preparing for almost the last 16 months – we have put in a lot of time, effort and sacrifice so we could accomplish this difficult mission," said Capt. Pat Moran, commander of 235th Military Police Company, while addressing his Soldiers. "One thing that I know about the 235th, is we are ready, we are trained, and we have the leaders and experience to handle this mission. I know that our Soldiers and family will get through this next year together."

This will be the fourth time the unit has been federally mobilized since 9/11. The unit deployed stateside to Fort Carson in 2003, and twice to Afghanistan in 2007 and 2013. This will be the first time a SDNG unit has performed this mission at Guantanamo.

The ceremony included remarks from several state and local government leaders, including Gov. Kristi Noem, Congressman Dusty Johnson, Rapid City Mayor Steve Allender and SDNG Adjutant General, Maj. Gen. Jeff Marlette.



(Photo by Staff Sgt. Austin Pearce)

**A Soldier from the 235th Military Police Company waits with family during a deployment ceremony at The Monument's Fine Arts Theatre, Rapid City, Jan. 11.**



(Photo by Staff Sgt. Austin Pearce)

**A Soldier from the 235th Military Police Company holds child during a deployment ceremony at The Monument's Fine Arts Theatre, Rapid City, Jan. 11.**

"There is not a doubt in any of our minds that you will serve with excellence and that you will be an example to those around you of what service with dignity and respect for others is," said Noem. "I am so incredibly grateful that you are going to serve, protecting our freedoms and our liberties in a very unique mission that is so incredibly necessary."

"We simply cannot say thank you enough on behalf of a grateful state and a grateful nation," said Johnson. "For those of us who have not served we cannot know the kind of cost this has on families and our citizen-Soldiers, so we just have to say thank you."

The unit will report to Fort Bliss, Texas, to complete several weeks of training prior to deployment overseas.

"To the families and members of the 235th, thank you for your sacrifice, inspiration, commitment and everything you have done and will continue to do in the future," said Moran. "You are all true heroes in your own right, and in many ways that is a more difficult task to ensure life continues back in South Dakota."

# SD National Guard presents awards for distinguished service during annual military dining out

By SDNG Public Affairs Office

PIERRE – The South Dakota National Guard presented several awards for distinguished service to a family, employer, and a public servant during its annual Dining-Out at the Ramkota Hotel and Convention Center in Pierre, Feb. 3.

The annual event brings together National Guard members from across the state for a formal evening to honor the organization's history and to recognize individual achievements from the past year.

The awards presented include recognition of outstanding volunteerism by a SDNG family, outstanding support from a South Dakota Reserve Component employer, and a public servant for lifetime service in support of the SDNG mission.

The event keynote speaker Gov. Kristi Noem and Maj. Gen. Jeff Marlette, SDNG adjutant general, presented the awards.

## ESGR Pro Patria Award – Spearfish Middle School

Spearfish Middle School is awarded the South Dakota Employer Support of the Guard and Reserve Pro Patria Award. The Pro Patria Award is presented annually to one South Dakota employer who provides exceptional support to national defense through leadership practices and personnel policies that support employees serving in the National Guard and Reserve.

First Lieutenants Leslie and Josh Wangeman, who both work as eighth grade science teachers, nominated their employer for award. Josh serves with the 842nd Engineer Company and Leslie serves with the 211th Engineer Company.

According to the Wangemans, Spearfish Middle School goes above and beyond in their responsibilities to ensure both are successful in their military careers. When the Wangemans were both gone for a five-month training program, which overlapped the school year, the school examined its policies towards military service and added a military leave policy, ensuring it followed all USERRA requirements protecting service member employment rights.



(Photo by Staff Sgt. Austin Pearce)

**Michele Anderson, center, along with her son, Taylor, receives the Williamson Militiaman Award presented by Maj. Gen. Jeff Marlette, SDNG adjutant general, Gov. Kristi Noem, and retired Maj. Gen. Ronald Williamson during the South Dakota National Guard Dining-Out in Pierre, Feb. 3.**

Additionally, when the 842nd Engineer Company was activated in January 2021 in support of the 59th Presidential Inauguration, the school was extremely supportive of their activation for service, despite short notice. The district covered all their substitute teacher plans, giving Leslie and Josh the ability to concentrate on their mission with minimum distraction.

“Spearfish School District Superintendent Kirk Easton, a former member of the SDNG and a veteran of Operation Iraqi Freedom, has done an outstanding job reaching out to the ESGR Program regarding questions and guidance,” said Leslie. Principal Don Lyon has also shown continuous support throughout our careers.”

Through its leadership and practices, the Spearfish Middle School's has made it easier for those serving in uniform to fulfill their duties and obligations as members of the National Guard and Reserve.

## The Adjutant General's Family Award – The Stiegelmeier Family

The Adjutant General's Family Award recipient is the Stiegelmeier Family. The award recognizes family members who support their service members in a truly exemplary manner while managing family, careers, or even hardship, all the while not seeking recognition for their sacrifices.

Master Sgt. Kevin Stiegelmeier, his wife, Ann, and their three children are the epitome of a resilient military family. Kevin is a member of the 196th Maneuver Enhancement Brigade of Sioux Falls.

The Stiegelmeier's support to the SDNG Family Readiness Group Program has been a whole-family effort for the past 20 years. Since 2001, the Stiegelmeiers have supported multiple units through many deployments.

While their children started out only being participants in unit FRG activities,

they progressively became more engaged in the program over time, volunteering to assist with different groups, events, and activities. In 2018, Ann stepped up to be the 196th MEB's Family Readiness Group lead volunteer as the unit prepared and mobilized for a deployment to Africa. Kevin and Ann's daughter, Alison, also volunteered to be the FRG's treasurer during this time.

"This family has been the backbone and the muscle for many FRG events and they are not afraid to be personally invested in supporting a unit," said Lt. Col. Quenten Johnson, SDNG Service Member and Family Support director. "They are the epitome of true selfless-service and many families have benefited from their service and support."

The Stiegelmeier's guidance and insight into family readiness has provided much comfort to those experiencing the difficulties of deployment and the sacrifices which all endure during them – especially for those families experiencing it for the first time.

**The Williamson Militiaman Award – Michele Anderson**

The Williamson Militiaman Award recipient is Michele Anderson of Rapid City. The Williamson Militiaman Award, established in 1987 by Maj. Gen. Ronald F. Williamson, recognizes an individual who exemplifies the spirit of the citizen-Soldier or Airman as shown by their community leadership, their support of the National Guard and the defense of the country.

Anderson has been supporting the military and its families for over 26 years. She is a former member of the SDNG, enlisting in 1997 as an administrative specialist with the 109th Engineer Group. She also served six years working full time in recruiting and education.

Following her military service in 2003, Anderson began working as a contractor for the SDNG as the Family Assistance Center coordinator, where she helped prepare and assist families through the deployment process.

After ten years of supporting South Dakota families, Anderson was selected by National Guard Bureau to train the Family Assistance Program at the national level helping to educate 420 family assistance center staff.

In 2015, Michelle came back to the South Dakota National Guard to serve as its Survivor Outreach Services coordinator. As such, Michelle ensures survivors of fallen service members remain valued members of the Army family. Her work bridges the connections for



(Photo by Staff Sgt. Austin Pearce)

**Spearfish Middle School receives the South Dakota Employer Support for the Guard and Reserve Pro Patria Award during the South Dakota National Guard Dining-Out in Pierre, Feb. 3. The Pro Patria Award is presented annually to one South Dakota employer who provides exceptional support of national defense through leadership and personnel policies that support employees serving in the National Guard or Reserve.**



(Photo by Staff Sgt. Austin Pearce)

**The Stiegelmeier Family, Master Sgt. Kevin Stiegelmeier and wife, Ann, left, along with their children receive the Adjutant General's Family Award presented by Maj. Gen. Jeff Marlette, SDNG adjutant general, and Gov. Kristi Noem during the South Dakota National Guard Dining-Out in Pierre, Feb. 3. The award recognizes family members who support service members in an exemplary manner while managing family, careers, or even hardship, all the while not seeking recognition for their sacrifices.**

survivors by providing life skills education, expertise and tracking of military benefits, access to bereavement or financial counselors, and assisting with management of milestones.

Anderson is there for South Dakota families for as long as family members' desire. Through her efforts, she has supported over 800 survivors to date.

In addition to her work supporting families, Michele is also a spouse to retired Chief Warrant Officer 4 Brett Anderson and mother

to their three children: Zach, Taylor and Ema. Michelle's family support helps drive her work in assisting others.

"Michelle Anderson embodies the spirit of the Williamson Militiaman Award and we are honored to have her as part of our family," said Maj. Gen. Jeff Marlette, SDNG adjutant general. "The level of support and excellence she provides is truly outstanding and we cannot thank her enough for her service and dedication to our military families."

# SOS coordinator provides support for surviving families of fallen

By Lt. Col. Anthony Deiss – SDNG Public Affairs Office Affairs Office

**F**or families of fallen service members, the death of their loved one is a very difficult and emotional time. These survivors must adjust to life without their service member, and they may be left wondering who to turn to for support.

For the families of fallen Soldiers from South Dakota, they turn to Michele Anderson for assistance. As a member of the South Dakota National Guard's Service Member and Family Support team in Rapid City, Anderson serves as the state's coordinator for Survivor Outreach Services, a U.S. Army program designed to provide long-term assistance to surviving families.

As a SOS support coordinator for the past six years at Camp Rapid, Anderson ensures survivors remain valued members of the Army family.

"The purpose of Survivor Outreach Services is to deliver the Army's commitment to families of the fallen," Anderson said. "When a service member dies, families are forced to deal with the loss of their loved one, and our military families should not have to lose their military connection."

Support coordinators help to bridge that connection for survivors by providing life skills education, expertise and tracking of military benefits, access to bereavement or financial counselors, and assisting with management of milestones and goal setting.

"I have the opportunity to ensure every survivor receives all they are entitled to," Anderson said. "Benefits and entitlements do not just automatically occur and many are timed benefits. Ensuring survivors do not miss any important time lines and requirements is something I take great pride in."

"Michele is extremely knowledgeable, professional and organized," said Becky Sayler, whose husband, U.S. Army Reserve Sgt. 1st Class Douglas Sayler, passed away in 2007. "She stays up to date on all the latest information and is always on top of the program."

The SOS program provides services for the entire state and for the different components of the Army (active duty, National Guard or Reserve). Regardless of a Soldier's duty status, location, or manner of death, the program is there for South Dakota families and for as long as family members' desire.

"Many times after a loss of a loved one, there are unresolved issues or questions that may surface months or even years later," Anderson said. No matter the timeframe, the SOS program is there to assist.

According to Anderson, every casualty case is unique as are the needs and expectations of the survivors. The SOS program provides a tailored response specific to the needs of the family.

"Losing a loved one is not only an emotional loss but can be the loss



of community, financial stability, and hopes and dreams,” Anderson said. “The SOS program provides survivors with a connection to other survivors, as well as specialized support to help navigate the challenges that come with losing a loved one.”

“Michele has helped us out by always answering my questions and helps me through the process all the way to completion,” Saylor said, who had three children with her husband Doug. “She has made numerous phone calls for me and with me. She is very appreciated, as is this program, which has tremendously helped us out both emotionally and financially.”

Anderson has been supporting the military and families for 26 years. She enlisted in the SDNG in 1997 as an administrative specialist with the 109th Engineer Group. Anderson also served for six years working full-time in recruiting and education. Following her military service in 2003, she began working as a contractor for the SDNG as the Family Assistance Center coordinator, preparing and assisting families during the mobilization and reintegration of their deployed service member.

After more than 10 years as the FAC coordinator, Anderson was selected to serve as a national trainer for the National Guard Bureau’s Family Assistance Program, helping to train 420 family assistance center staff across the nation. Anderson also served for three years as the Family Readiness Group lead volunteer for the SDNG’s 196th Regional Training Institute.

In addition to her work supporting families, Anderson is also a spouse and mother. She and her husband, retired Chief Warrant Officer 4 Brett Anderson, have been married for 20 years and they have three children. Anderson’s family support helps drive her work assisting others.

“Our family truly embraces the sacrifice service members and families make each and every day,” said Anderson. “Brett and I both are devoted to serving our state and nation. As parents, our children have been raised to understand our American life isn’t without cost and sacrifice. The drive of our success is attributed to honoring all those that make the same commitment of duty and service.”

Anderson began her work as the South Dakota SOS coordinator in 2015. Since then, she has supported over 800 survivors and today is actively supporting over 400 of them. On Feb. 3, Anderson was awarded the SDNG’s 2022 Williamson Militiaman Award for her lifetime of service in support of military families and the SDNG mission.

“Michelle Anderson embodies the spirit of the Williamson Militiaman Award and we are honored to have her as part of our family,” said Maj. Gen. Jeff Marlette, SDNG adjutant general. “The level of support and excellence she provides is truly outstanding and we cannot thank her enough for her service and dedication to our military families.”

Anderson says successful support to families is attributed to being organized and persistently determined to ensure survivors are in receipt of all they are due. Each survivor has individual circumstances and situations that contribute to the eligibility of benefits and entitlements.

“Casualty is not a one shoe fits all outcome,” Anderson said. Benefits for spouses happen as many as nine times throughout their life; for children, milestones may occur as many as eight times.

“This is a lot to manage and keep track of without dealing with life’s obstacles or changes,” Anderson added. “Success is ensuring survivors do not miss their entitlements.”

With success come challenges. Helping survivors during their grief is one of the most difficult aspects.

“The absolute most challenging part of my job is witnessing survivors navigate grief,” Anderson explained. “Everyone copes differently, but for all, the pain of loss is excruciating. At times, it can feel helpless. I am determined to find opportunities on how the SOS program can help.”

“She is respectful of the families she helps and very understanding of their situation,” Saylor said. “She is a true example of a caring and compassionate person.”

Despite these struggles, Anderson witnesses daily the strength and resiliency of military families. It is one of the many things she finds most rewarding in her work.

“The journey is full of challenges but their determination to drive on is incredible,” Anderson said. “The children of our fallen are unstoppable! These kids are fighters and determined to succeed. It

is so rewarding to help coordinate benefits so the education dreams and goals turn into reality.”

“My daughter Megan was struggling with class in college, so she called Michele. Michele took the time to help calm her down and get her focus back,” Saylor said. “She has helped each one of my children. She goes above and beyond the call of duty.”

While the SOS program is there to support survivors, there is something simple anyone

can do to help support a family that has lost a loved one.

“Survivors’ dealing with loss will always and forever be impacted by their loved one’s death,” Anderson said. “Please do not be afraid to reach out to survivors to let them know you care about them. Do not allow your fears of not knowing what to say stop you from reaching out. It is okay to say, ‘I do not have the right words, but I care about you deeply.’”

For the surviving families of South Dakota’s fallen Soldiers, they can take comfort in knowing the SOS program and Michele Anderson will be there for them to turn to for care, compassion and support.

“Our standards in South Dakota are very high with respect to taking care of each other,” Anderson said. “It is easy to give all you have knowing that your teammates are doing the same. Some people spend their life seeking their dream job. My dream job is serving our military families! This is not my passion; it is my way of life. I am truly humbled to be a part of our successes.”

“Michele is not only our survivor outreach coordinator but has earned a spot in our hearts as a wonderful and caring friend,” Saylor said. “Michele is very passionate about her job and helping others. She is definitely one person who I am glad is on our team.”



Michele Anderson, with husband, Chief Warrant Officer 4 Brett Anderson (retired), and two of their three children, Ema and Taylor.

# Service Member and Family Support coordinator serves with passion to assist others

By Staff Sgt. Dustin Jordan - SDNG Public Affairs Office

**M**ilitary families are strong and resilient. However, even the strongest need assistance sometimes. When South Dakota National Guard families need help, they turn to the Service Member and Family Support program. While the mission of SMFS program is to enhance and empower the lives of its customers by providing exceptional service and support, the program's coordinator, Lt. Col. Quenten Johnson, is doing the same for its people.

As the program's coordinator for the past seven years, Johnson's primary responsibility is to support and empower his teammates to be able to accomplish the SMFS mission. He is passionate about the work that he and all of the members of the program do to help service members and their families.

"I have a passion for helping and improving others," said Johnson. "After my deployment in 2004, I wanted to be part of a team that had direct effects on service members and their families."

The SMFS team helps service members, veterans, their families and their employers as they transition through their entire military career: from initial enlistment, during deployments, and to retirement. They even help families feel supported and connected after a service member has passed.

There are several instances that Johnson can recall where the SMFS team have had a tremendous impact on service members and their families.

"Over the course of four-five years, I watched the child of a service-member go from being a camper at our 12 to 14 year-old youth camp to a junior counselor and eventually to a service member them self," said Johnson. "Through the experience, they personally expressed their appreciation for the doors and opportunities the Youth Program afforded them. Everything from the intangible leadership skills, to eligibility for scholarships, and the support and mentorship in joining the National Guard.

"I could go on and on, but the SMFS team does an exceptional job of treating each and every customer like they are family," Johnson continued. "We do not simply give an answer; we assist our customers by providing empathy to truly understand their situation and needs."

Johnson provides leadership and stability to the SMFS team, which is essential to helping families in an ever-changing military climate.

"Lt. Col. Johnson's commitment to SMFS has provided continuity and consistency to our team members, leadership, and customers," said Michele Anderson, Survivor Outreach Services coordinator. "Lt. Col. Johnson has been a part of the SMFS program for seven years, his time and dedication to SMFS has enforced stable ground."

Johnson is not only committed to helping the SMFS customers, he is also committed to helping and facilitating the success of his team as well.

"Just as the Soldier is the organization's customer, my team is my customer. I am here to facilitate and ensure their success," said Johnson. "I will hold them accountable for their responsibilities and I will encourage them to try new things."

Johnson serves on several community boards designed to further the community-based support of service members, veterans, and their families.



Lt. Col. Quenten Johnson, with wife, Wendy, and their children, Carter and Hannah.

"He is very engaged in our organization and beyond," said Anderson. "He gives extra effort and time to collaboration. He is very involved on several committees and advisory councils to help strengthen our programs within Service Member and Family Support."

Johnson also serves as a co-chair on the State Family Programs Advisory Council. The mission of the council is to serve as the technical advisor and advocate on behalf of the 54 states and territories to meet National Guard Bureau and Department of the Army, Service Member and Family program objectives.

He also has many years of involvement with the National Guard Association of South Dakota. Within this organization, he has held multiple roles to include second vice, first vice and president. He currently serves as the executive director where he is responsible for the day-to-day activities of the organization.

Johnson's service continues to go above and beyond assisting others. In February, Johnson voluntarily deployed with the 513th Military Intelligence Brigade out of Fort Gordon, Georgia, to serve as the brigade deputy commander. He will be stationed in Kuwait and provide theater level intelligence support to United States Central Command.

By striving to enhance and empower the lives of others, Johnson's service and dedication has made an impact on the programs and organizations he supports.

"Johnson has demonstrated his leadership excellence from the start of his military career," said retired Brig. Gen. Marshall Michels, former SDNG director of the joint staff. "He truly believes in service above self...senior leaders look upon him as the type of officer who knows how to make things happen and the type of leader that does not except mediocrity."

# Son follows father, family's lineage of military service

By Lt. Col. Anthony Deiss - SDNG Public Affairs Office

**T**he son of a former South Dakota National Guard soldier is following in the footsteps of his father by becoming the newest member of the organization he once served. Connor Briest, son of Sgt. Corey Briest, of Yankton, was sworn in to the SDNG during an enlistment ceremony at the Military Entrance Processing Station in Sioux Falls, March 11.

Connor enlisted in the same occupation and unit his father was in 17 years earlier, as an artillery crewmember in the Yankton-based Bravo Battery (formerly Charlie Battery) of the 1-147th Field Artillery Battalion.

While Connor and Corey share a similar story to many other fathers and mothers whose sons and daughters also join the National Guard – what makes their story unique is the challenges their family has had to overcome.

Corey was severely injured during an IED explosion that also claimed the lives of several SDNG soldiers while serving on a deployment to Iraq in 2005. Despite his injuries, Corey made a remarkable recovery. Connor, who was just a year old when Corey was injured, grew up experiencing the challenges his father and family would face in the years to come.

Despite a traumatic brain injury which left Corey with limited mobility, vision and speech, seeing his father's resilience and call to service was a motivating factor for Connor to join the National Guard.

"I want to honor my dad for one," Connor said of why he joined the SDNG. "I've always wanted to do it, since I was very young. I'm pretty excited to serve my country and follow my dad."

"This is something he has always wanted, and we are proud to support him and the decision he is making," said Jenny Briest, Connor's mother and Corey's wife. "As parents, we sat down and talked to him and wanted to make sure why he was joining, and he has very good reasons of doing it."

"Connor knows first hand of what the sacrifice is and what comes with the commitment that he is making, because this is all he has known since he was little," Jenny added. "But Connor also sees the brotherhood of [the National Guard] and what this can do for his life."

Connor, like Corey, joins the SDNG during his junior year of high school and will attend Basic Combat Training later this summer, followed by his Advanced Individual Training after graduation next year.

While Connor said he excited to begin his service, his future plans also include attending Mitchell Technical Institute to be an electrical power lineman following his military training.

Connor is not only following his dad into the SDNG, he is also following his family's lineage of military service.

"Both Corey's and my grandpas served, Connor's step-grandpa was in the same unit as Corey, and many of our uncles also served, so we have a pretty good family line of service," said Jenny.

As Connor took his oath of enlistment, making the moment even more special was having his father there to witness his commitment to our state and nation.

Although Corey's speech is limited, Jenny says Corey thinks it's pretty neat Connor is in the same unit with the same occupation as he. "Corey says he feels honored that he is joining, he's pretty proud of him," she said.

While Corey is proud of his son and his decision to serve, Connor feels the same about his father.

"My dad is a hero of mine, and he made one of the greatest sacrifices possible for our nation," Connor said.



Connor Briest stands with his father, Sgt. Corey Briest, and mother, Jenny.



Connor Briest recites the Oath of Enlistment as administered by an officer with the Military Entrance Processing Station in Sioux Falls, March 11.

# Immutable

By Chaplain (Maj.) David A. Stimes - Joint Force Headquarters

What does this mean? In essence to be immutable is to be unchangeable on steroids. Although we might chuckle and think we know someone like that, there is actually only One who is truly immutable, not needing any change. As humans we are susceptible to change. We can change on a whim, or to stay popular or comfortable, or even to protect ourselves. Because we are not perfect, we can also change for the better. Change can be good and necessary. But what happens when we put our faith and trust in people, who do change? We can find them difficult to understand, to satisfy or to follow, resulting in confusion, frustration and bewilderment, and even feel disenfranchised.

Fortunately we do have an alternative to focus on. There is One above all others that we can count on to be the same today and tomorrow as He was yesterday and last year. "Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and forever" (Hebrews 13:8). "I the Lord do not change. So you, O descendants of Jacob, are not destroyed" (Malachi 3:6). This is one of the core attributes of God and helps define the others. For simplicity we will not expound on the full meaning of the Malachi passage lest we break out in a sermon and frighten some away. The message is clear, God (The Father, The Son and the Holy Spirit) does not change (like shifting shadows).

He is not influenced by his own interests that are not necessarily in the best interest of others. He doesn't choose a path that is easiest or more comfortable for Himself. He does what is right no matter the cost. Must we be reminded of His path to the cross where He was crucified for our sins? He never changes, never frustrates, never surprises, and never alters reality. He does what is right no matter how many don't like the truth.

Jesus is not susceptible to change. He doesn't check with anyone or take any polls to decide who to be or what to do. He is who He says He is and does what He says He will do without the influence of anyone or anything, let alone which way the wind is blowing today. Best of all, He is not an authoritarian that demands His way, but instead offers a better way without a demand and gives us the free will to follow or not

to follow. The following passage is one of many examples. "That if you confess with your mouth, 'Jesus is Lord,' and believe in your heart that God raised Him from the dead, you will be saved. For it is with your heart that you believe and are justified, and it is with your mouth that you confess and are saved. As the Scripture says, 'Anyone who trusts in Him will never be put to shame...Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved'" (Romans 10:9-13). You should see clearly that this is not a mandate.



Here are three quick observations about God's immutability. God is unchanging in His being, His very existence, personality, and person (Psalm 102:25-27), God is unchanging in His purpose (Isaiah 46:9-11), and unlike politicians, God is unchanging in His promises (Numbers 23:19-20). Christianity is deeply grounded in this significant characteristic of stability and assurance. Our world is not. There is comfort in consistency – knowing what to expect and what He expects. Not so in our nation and our world. A fourth observation, He will not change into what you might want Him to be. He is perfect, Holy, righteous, the only One who truly has your best interests in mind, and needs no change.

Our faith and hope and knowledge must ultimately depend on the One who is infinitely worthy of trust, because He is absolutely and eternally unchanging in his Holy BEING, PURPOSE, and PROMISES. If you are weary from the world, I invite you to come follow Jesus. He is a leader that is easy to follow. Blessing to all!

*David A. Stimes*  
 Chaplain (Maj.) David A. Stimes

# Challenging times

By Maj. Carol Jordan — Mentorship Committee Chair, Diversity council - JFHQ

"The ultimate measure of a man is not where he stands in moments of comfort and convenience, but where he stands at times of challenge and controversy." —Martin Luther King, Jr.

As we look at the health of our organization, our nation, and ourselves, we tend to look for quick answer or solutions. The decision fatigue that comes at times with too much or conflicting information can impact the whole of our work and personal lives. At some point we just need to find a way forward.

"We need to get back to the basics and focus on our jobs." MG Jeffrey Marlette.

Just because the solution is simple it doesn't mean it's easy. If you

have a mentor, reach out to them and nurture that relationship, because relationships matter. If you are a mentor, do a check in and help refocus on the basics.

We are all here voluntarily and we all serve because it's who we are. Let's take care of one another.

