



FORGING THE

WARRIOR SPIRIT

The JRTC and Fort Polk Guardian

Vol. 48, No. 21

Home of Heroes @ Fort Polk, LA

May 27, 2021



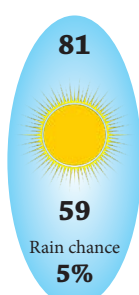
CHUCK CANNON / GUARDIAN

Freedom is not free

Soldiers with Bravo Battery, 5th Battalion, 25th Field Artillery Regiment, 3rd Brigade Combat Team, 10th Mountain Division, fire a 21-gun salute during the Memorial Day Ceremony held

May 27 at Fort Polk's War Memorial Park. Brig Gen. David S. Doyle, Joint Readiness Training Center and Fort Polk was the keynote speaker. See page 5 for story and photos.

Weekend weather



Inside the Guardian

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Viewpoint

Writer contemplates Memorial Day's meaning

By Retired Lt. Col. MARK LESLIE
DPTMS

Editor's note: This commentary was first published in the Guardian in May 2019. It bears repeating.

For me, Memorial Day is difficult. It is a day filled with mixed emotions. I am not overly sensitive, but it upsets me when someone innocently says, "Happy Memorial Day," or thanks me for my service.

This day is not about me, or anyone else that served or is currently wearing the uniform. This day is to honor those that have perished in the service of our nation: Those that have made the ultimate sacrifice; those that are no longer with us; those we were privileged to know.

I'm not one of the veterans that say, "All the heroes I know are dead," because they are not. I know plenty of true-life heroes. I served with many of them; many of them are right here at Fort Polk while others are scattered across the nation and globe. They are very much alive.

They are extraordinary human beings that performed incredible acts of selfless service and bravery on and off the battlefield. I am honored and privileged to have known these

Soldiers — it is one of the many blessings I have had in my life and I reflect on them often. But they are honored on Veterans Day, not Memorial Day.

Memorial Day is for heroes no longer here with us. Admittedly, some of them are no longer here because of things beyond a leader's control and honest mistakes caused by the fog of war and the fact that combat is just that — combat. I share this only to help put this in context to the meaning of Memorial Day and why so many veterans feel the same ire when one wishes us a happy Memorial Day.

It is not necessarily a happy day, but neither is it a day filled with remorse. It is a strange mix of emotions that those not experienced with the bond that service builds or the horror of combat and the loss that accompanies it, will ever understand. I feel grateful for having known a few of those that have made this ultimate sacrifice, and I reflect on the time shared with them as some of the highlights of my life.

I feel I would have a much emptier life if I had not been given this gift of knowing them, their

friendship and Soldierly camaraderie. But then I feel deeply saddened their family and we as an Army and nation lost them so early and their full potential will never be known. Sometimes — no, many times — not just on Memorial Day, I am grief-stricken with thoughts of them. I feel that this grief is somewhat selfish, for what I feel can be nothing compared to what their family feels.



LESLIE

In my 30 years in the Army and several conflicts, I was considered rather bold and maybe even reckless with my own safety in dangerous situations. I don't think it was brave, just fear cloaked in necessity, and the bravado and showmanship required of my position.

But those characteristics do not carry on in every aspect of life. This

Memorial Day will mark the eighth anniversary of one of my close friends being killed in combat. I have yet to summon the moral courage to visit his final resting place and pay my proper respects, to share that final drink with him or tell him how much I miss him. I have refrained for many reasons, but I think that revelation alone should tell the uninitiated why I don't want you to tell me, "happy Memorial Day," and I think many combat veterans harbor the same thoughts.

This Memorial Day, I hope to make that overdue journey, Todd. I owe you that much.

So, on this Memorial Day, when you see your veteran husband, father, son or daughter deep in reflection, don't wish them a happy Memorial Day. Give them a moment, give them some space, and most importantly, give them some understanding and finally — just maybe a hug. Let them know you understand. Listen to the stories they tell of their friends.

As the noted English novelist Terry Pratchett said: "Do you not know that a man is not dead while his name is still spoken?" This quote aptly fits the stories told by a veteran of a friend no longer here. He is likely trying to keep his friend's memory alive through telling of his exploits and contributions.

A hero lives forever in the minds of many. Today is not about the veteran or the active-duty Soldier — it is about the men and women buried across this nation in countless veteran and local cemeteries. They are not faceless, they are our friends, and fathers, sons and daughters — and we miss them.

COMMENTARY



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Links to the Guardian are also included in all-users emails to government email users and by request to non-military units. To be included on all-users messages email **kimberly.k.reischling.civ@mail.mil**.

All editorial content of the Guardian is prepared, edited, provided and approved by the Public Affairs Office, Joint Readiness Training Center and Fort Polk.

For more information on Fort Polk units and happenings visit the following Facebook pages:

@JRTCOperationsGrp, **@BayneJonesACH** or **@fortpolkmwr**.

Briefs

School registration

Registration for Vernon Parish Pre-school Programs (LA4 and Head Start) for the 2020-21 school year is ongoing. You can visit the school of your choice to register during school hours. Applications can also be completed online via the Vernon Parish School Board website (<https://www.vpsb.us>) for school age children 4 years old. For more information call 337.537.5109 or 337.239.6899.

Change of command

The Fort Polk community is invited to attend the 1st Battalion, 509th Infantry Regiment (Airborne) change of command as Lt. Col. Henry Moltz relinquishes command to Lt. Col. Brendan D. Fitzgerald Tuesday at 10 a.m. on Spike Field, located at 8433 Mississippi Ave. The inclement weather location is the Bayou Theater, 7830 Mississippi Avenue. A reception follows at the Geronimo Resilience Center, 2155 16th Street. Dress code is duty uniform for military; business casual for civilians. To RSVP contact Capt. Gregory Taliaferro at (229) 894-7467.

Repair project begins

The Alabama Avenue repair project from Third Street to LA Hwy. 10 begins June 14, the segment of Alabama Avenue south of Louisiana Avenue will be closed for about three weeks. Motorists accessing facilities along 14th, 15th, 16th, 22nd and 23rd streets will be detoured through Mississippi Avenue.

Bellrichard Avenue and 23rd Street will remain open for through traffic. Facilities with access limited to Alabama Avenue will be accessed off of Georgia Avenue with flaggers providing safe passage across the work zone.

Primary construction impacts will be single lane closures. Rough road conditions and loose aggregate are possible near these work zones. Motorists should anticipate traffic delays due to closures and flagging operations and pedestrians are encouraged to stay clear of work zones.



COURTESY 705th EOD Co

705th EOD bolsters allied forces explosive device capabilities

By 1st Lt. RHYS E. JACOBSON
705th EOD Co

FORT POLK, La. — Soldiers from the 705th Explosive Ordnance Disposal Company recently returned from Africa, where they hosted training for Nigerian and Chadian forces to help bolster allied forces' capabilities in the counter improvised explosive device fight. Staff Sgt. Jonathan Walker was the EOD Team Leader in Niger, accompanied by his team member, Spc. Jenna Crerar; while in Chad, team leader Sgt. 1st Class Tommy Oakley was accompa-

nied by team member Timothy Moss. Their day-to-day schedule consisted primarily of training these host nation forces, to better prepare them for the C-IED fight, as well as other hazards they are likely to encounter.

The explosive ordnance disposal technicians were the first wave of Soldiers to return to these countries since the outbreak of COVID-19. Despite the small size, the 705th EOD Company is a force multiplier, supporting the Africa mission, while simultaneously responding to unexploded ordnance at Fort Polk, and performing local response throughout the region.

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Army News

Deployed Soldier, Olympic hopeful, 'Breakin' barriers

BY DAVID VERGUN
Army News Service

AL ASAD, Iraq — For Staff Sgt. Brianna Pritchard, an Army National Guard UH-60 Black Hawk helicopter mechanic from Anchorage, Alaska, it all started with a dream to become an Olympian ... and a little bit of genetics.

Staff Sgt. Pritchard's father was an avid hockey player who had a shot at making it to the professional level had it not been for a skiing injury that limited movement in his legs. She grew up playing hockey and softball. She aspired to be a collegiate-level athlete in both sports.

"My father was an incredible hockey player. We always used to watch the movie 'Miracle' about the 1980 hockey team," said Pritchard. "I have always eyed the Olympics because I thought it was such a high honor. I already loved being an athlete. What better way to represent the USA than to be a professional athlete, so I always wanted to be in the Olympics."

However, Pritchard's path to the Olympics is not through a traditional sport. She is involved in break dancing, which is what it was called by the media in the 1980s, but the competitive sport is called breaking.

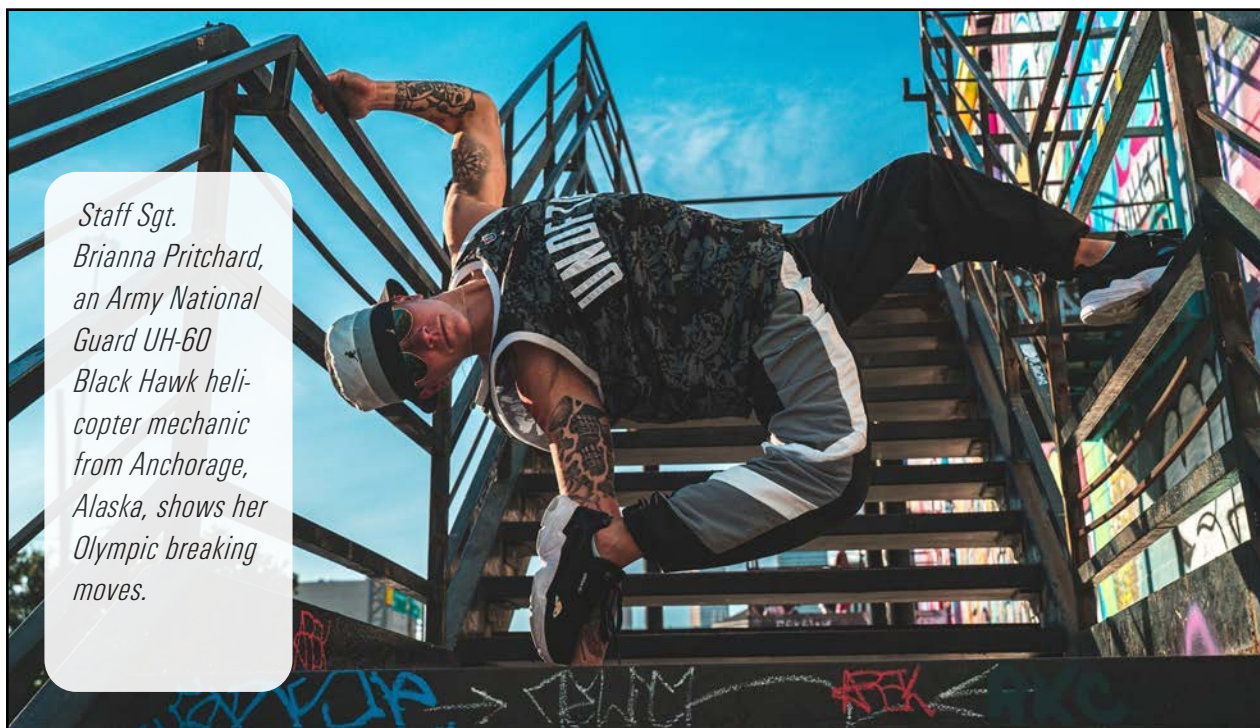
Breaking is new to the Olympic scene and was officially inducted into the Olympics in December 2020. Since then, United States of America Breaking has been working diligently with the International Olympic Committee and the United States of America dance committee to host point-driven competitions to build the team for the Olympics in Paris 2024.

Staff Sgt. Pritchard got into breaking about 14 years ago. Her father did it in high school in the 80s, but he didn't stick with it because it was more of a fad to him. When she found breaking, she dove in whole-heartedly and gave all her time to it, giving up sports completely because her passion was breaking.

"I've always enjoyed the music we dance to. It's very instrumental," said Pritchard. "The music is rhythmic and RPM (revolutions per minute) beats is what we dance to. Many times we dance to instrumental beats, but we still have some old school hip-hop we dance to as well."

The Alaska native's parents were a little

Staff Sgt. Brianna Pritchard, an Army National Guard UH-60 Black Hawk helicopter mechanic from Anchorage, Alaska, shows her Olympic breaking moves.



DAVID HONG / ARMY NEWS SERVICE

cautious when she first told them about breaking because of the stigma that surrounded it. Pritchard said they thought it was a "street" thing and she might hang around the wrong crowd. But instead, she ended up meeting people from all over the world and has been able to learn about different cultures. As her parents saw the great things she was doing and how happy she was, they became more supportive.

"My father is always my biggest supporter and cheerleader. He loves everything I do, he loves it," said Pritchard. "It would be just as big a dream for him as it would be for me to see me as an Olympian. He would absolutely love it and that's my number one goal."

Staff Sgt. Pritchard was always with an all-male crew growing up and credits her male counterparts for her strength-oriented style. Now she's with an all-female crew and the dynamics are great. She pointed out that females understand the strengths, weaknesses and abilities more than their male counterparts. The UH-60 mechanic chooses to train hard on strength and endurance to defeat those weaknesses.

If she qualifies for the Olympics, she will be competing in the female division against women from all over the world. When she is competing against women from outside of the U.S., the caliber of competition is very high. She has trained for this for the past five years, honing in on the endurance side of the house.

When COVID-19 hit, Pritchard's training options were limited, so she took online classes from her mentors in Texas and Finland.

"I've sacrificed a lot. My classes were from Monday to Friday, starting at 7 a.m. CST, so I was waking up at 3 a.m. just to make it to class," said Pritchard. "I would go to bed early, wake up early, take their class and then do my own one-hour workout consisting of weight lifting and sprint training regimens to increase my strength and stamina before I went to work."

For 14 years, Staff Sgt. Pritchard has traveled all over the United States, winning competitions in Arizona, Texas, Nevada, Hawaii and Florida. She also competed in an international competition in Europe where she placed 17th out of an estimated 200 females and also placed fourth in the USA Red Bull BC One National Finals in 2019.

In 2021, her Army National Guard unit was attached to the California Army National Guard's 40th Combat Aviation Brigade and activated to deploy to the Middle East as Task Force Phoenix. In the spring, she reported with her unit to North Fort Hood, Texas, went through two months of intense pre-deployment training. North Fort Hood is near Austin, Texas, where the Texas Breakin' Open 2021 Olympic qualifier took place in April. Her command gave her the opportunity to take a break from train-

Please see **Olympic**, page 10

Solemn ceremony remembers heroes at Fort Polk

By **CHUCK CANNON**
Public affairs/communications

"Our flag does not fly because the wind moves it. It flies with the last breath of each soldier who died protecting it." Unknown author.

FORT POLK, La. — Soldiers, Gold Star Family members, dignitaries and friends gathered May 27 in Fort Polk's Warrior Memorial Park to remember those who gave their lives in defense of freedom.

Brig. Gen. David S. Doyle, commanding general, Joint Readiness Training Center and Fort Polk, was the ceremony's keynote speaker. He gave a brief history of the phrase "Gold Star Family" dating back to World War I.

Doyle then explained the origins of Memorial Day following the Civil War, called Decoration Day at the time, because Families typically remembered their loved ones by decorating gravesites with flowers or flags, which Doyle said is still done today.

He said the Army considers its greatest asset to be its people.

"That goes to the heart of what it means to be an American," he said. "However, the cost of freedom is not borne equally by all Americans."

Doyle said the cost of freedom has been paid in many ways: On battlefields and veterans' cemeteries, by futures that never happened when military members made the ultimate sacrifice, and in the nation's commitment to never forget those missing in action.

"On Memorial Day, we pause in a formal setting to remember the sacrifices of those Soldiers, Sailors, Airmen, Marines and Coast Guardsmen that have come before us, that sacrificed their lives for their country," he said. "We pause to remember the 'last full measure' given by our Soldiers, and that their memory continues in our hearts each day.

"For those Soldiers that didn't return, Family members, friends and a grateful nation will always keep their memories alive."

Doyle said the cost of freedom continues to be paid for at places like the Joint Readiness Training Center as its trainers prepare the next unit to deploy on short notice for contingency operations.

"It is a cost — and more importantly — a commitment that we all share when we are assigned to Fort Polk," he said. "A commitment to provide the best training possible, to stress the leaders and units during their rotation, to try our best to prepare the units



Juanita Colunga, Gold Star Mother of Spc. Zeferino Colunga, points out her son's name on the Global War on Terrorism Memorial Monument in Fort Polk's War Memorial Park to other members of her Family following a Memorial Day Ceremony May 27.

for the unknown."

Doyle said that when reflecting on the past and preparing for the future, we should not pause just on Memorial Day, but every day to remember the bond forged with generations who selflessly served their country and paid the ultimate price.

"From the recent conflicts in Afghanistan and Iraq, back to the American Revolution, our Soldiers continuously put the welfare of the nation, the Army and their fellow Soldiers before their own," he said. "We honor those who paid the ultimate price in defense and service to the United States."

Chap. (Col.) Scott Hammond began the ceremony, offering an invocation. That was followed by the National Anthem, recognition of Gold Star Families and placement of the Installation Wreath by Doyle, JRTC and Fort Polk Command Sgt. Maj. Michael Henry, and Sergeant Audie Murphy Club member Sgt. 1st Class Timothy Perko in front of the Global War on Terrorism Memorial Monument.

Perko said he was honored to be part of the installation team that placed the wreath.

"Words can hardly suffice what this means to me," he said.

"These are brothers and sisters who have fallen. My mind thinks back to that Bible verse that says, 'No man has greater love than this, than he who lays down his life

for a friend.' That's what Christ did for us, and these Soldiers did the same thing when they fell.

"I can't think of any other greater honor than doing what I'm doing here today. It is a huge honor," he said.

Following Doyle's remarks, a 21-gun salute was fired by Bravo Battery, 5th Battalion, 25th Field Artillery Regiment, 3rd Brigade Combat Team, 10th Mountain Division. The salute was followed by the sounding of "Taps" by Spc. Zachary Farmer, 32nd Hospital Center, and the raising of the National Colors to full staff by Sgt. Shundrieka Jones, 32nd HC.

Juanita Colunga, mother of Spc. Zeferino Colunga, took time following the ceremony to point out her son's name on the War Memorial Monument to her daughter, son-in-law, granddaughter and nieces, who all made the trip from Brenham, Texas..

"This means a lot to me," she said. "It means my son has never been forgotten."

Colunga was killed in 2003.

"It was 19 years ago," his mom said. "Seeing that he's never been forgotten helps get me through, especially on days like today. I love coming here, to see where he used to work and run around."

A reception for Gold Star Families was held immediately following the ceremony in the Warrior Center.

In our view

Guardian staff asked the JRTC and Fort Polk community, "What would your perfect day consist of?"

Here are their responses:



Sian Jennifer Franklin: "I would hang out by the pool with friends, enjoy some good conversation, have a barbecue and play some board games."



Pfc. Marnez McDonald: "I would sleep all day because I'm busy and exhausted all the time."



Pfc. William Abarca: "I would wake up early, have some coffee and relax, go to the gym, eat pizza, hang out with my friends, read a book and go to sleep."



Pfc. Derek Leatherwood: "I would have a fun PT, have breakfast with my squad, eat lunch, get released early on a four day weekend with even more good times to come."

Fort Polk Soldiers charged with UCMJ infractions

OSJA

FORT POLK, La. — The preamble to the Manual for Courts-Martial states, "The purpose of military law is to promote justice, assist in maintaining good order and discipline in the armed forces, promote efficiency and effectiveness in the military establishment and strengthen the national security of the United States." At the Joint Readiness Training Center and Fort Polk, the commanding general and subordinate commanders take good order and discipline seriously.

Across Fort Polk, the following disciplinary issues continue to be prevalent: Driving under the influence of alcohol, wrongful use/possession of controlled substances, fraternization, sexual assault and underage drinking. Below are recent examples of adverse legal actions for units within the Fort Polk jurisdiction.

- A private, assigned to 519th Military Police Battalion, was punished under Article 15 for failing to go at the time prescribed to their appointed place of duty, in violation of 86, Uniform Code of Military Justice. The Soldier was sentenced to reduction to E-1, suspended, to be automatically remitted if not vacated on or before July 17; forfeiture of \$416 pay, suspended to be automatical-

ly remitted if not vacated on or before July 17; extra duty for 14 days, suspended, to be automatically remitted if not vacated on or before July 17; and restriction for 14 days, suspended to be automatically remitted if not vacated on or before July 17.

- A private, assigned to 519th Military Police Battalion, was punished under Article 15 for dereliction of duty by negligently discharging an electronic stun device at Access Control Point 1, in violation of Article 92, UCMJ. The Soldier was sentenced to reduction to E-2, suspended, to be automatically remitted if not vacated on or before July 17; forfeiture of \$416 pay, suspended to be automatically remitted if not vacated on or before July 17; extra duty for 14 days, suspended, to be automatically remitted if not vacated on or before July 17; and restriction for 14 days, suspended to be automatically remitted if not vacated on or before July 17.

- A specialist, assigned to 46th Engineer Battalion, was punished under Article 15 for wrongful use of tetrahydrocannabinol, in violation of Article 112a, UCMJ. The Soldier was sentenced to a reduction to E-1; forfeiture of \$892 pay per month for two months; \$466 pay, suspended, to be automatically remitted if not vacated on or before August 10; extra-duty for 45 days; restriction for 45 days; and an oral reprimand.



- A specialist, assigned to 1st Battalion (Airborne), 509th Infantry Regiment, was separated under Chapter 14-12c (Commission of a Serious Offense) for disrespect to a Commissioned Officer and a Non-Commissioned Officer. The Soldier was issued a General under honorable conditions characterization of service. Generally, this type of discharge results in the loss of a service member's educational benefits.

- A specialist, assigned to 1st Battalion (Airborne), 509th Infantry Regiment, was separated under Chapter 14-12c (Commission of a Serious Offense) for wrongfully telling derogatory and racist comments, assaulting another service member and dereliction of duty by failing to be at the funeral detail in ASUs. The Soldier was issued a General under honorable conditions characterization of service. Generally, this type of discharge results in the loss of a service member's educational benefits.

JRTC Operations Group hosts box tour



Family and community members taking part in the Joint Readiness Training Center Operations Group Box Tour posed with Soldiers as an explosion takes place in the background May 22.

Alex Calvin, left, checks out the M2 50 Cal as Pfc. Jeremy Young works to demonstrate how it works May 22.



Paratroopers jump from an airplane as part of the JRTC Ops Group Box Tour.



Louisiana State Rep. Charles Owen, District 30, shoots the M2 50 Cal machine gun during the JRTC and Ops Group Box Tour.



Corey Howard, of KALB Alexandria, covered the Box Tour May 22. When he wasn't taking video and interviewing those in attendance. Howard took a moment to experience what it was like to discharge an M2 50 Cal machine gun.



Walking town hall

Brig. Gen. David Doyle, commander of the Joint Readiness Training Center and Fort Polk, hosted a walking town hall May 24 from 4-6 p.m. through the Palmetto Housing area. The CG, and other members of the command group, stopped to listen to residents' concerns and answer questions about housing.



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GRILL SAFETY

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- Only use your grill outside. Keep it away from siding and deck rails
- Open grill first before turning it on
- Keep children and pets at least 3 feet away from the grill when in use
- Never leave your grill unattended
- Turn off the gas when not being used
- Clean your grill after each use to avoid grease build up that can start a fire

Fort Polk commanding general takes part in PT

Brig. Gen. David S. Doyle speaks to and does PT with U.S. Military Academy at West Point cadets May 24.



SHELBY WAREZ/PAO



Three NCOs inducted into SAMC at Fort Polk ceremony

By Staff Sgt. ASHLEY M. MORRIS
3rd BCT, 10th Mtn Div

FORT POLK, La. — Three Fort Polk Army noncommissioned officers were inducted into the Sergeant Audie Murphy Club during a ceremony hosted by the organizations' Bayou Chapter at the Warrior Center May 6.

Among the inductees was 1st Sgt. Victor Marquez from Headquarters and Headquarters Battery, 5th Battalion, 25th Field Artillery Regiment, 3rd Brigade Combat Team, 10th Mountain Division, Staff Sgt. Ryan Facklam and Staff Sgt. Reuben Fornah, both from Joint Readiness Training Center Operations Group.

Audie Leon Murphy is widely known as the most decorated Soldier in U.S. history, holding 33 awards, to include the Medal of Honor.

Murphy served during World War II, quickly rising through the ranks from private to staff sergeant through battlefield promotions before commissioning to second lieutenant.

The Sergeant Audie Murphy Club began in 1986 as a small club based out of Fort Hood, Texas. By 1994, membership expanded to Army-wide, with local installations overseeing the selection process.

Every noncommissioned officer who wishes to compete for membership must embody the club's motto: You lead from the front.

Throughout the selection process, can-



Staff Sgt. ASHLEY M. MORRIS/U.S. ARMY

didates participate in boards, volunteer in their local communities and attend to the needs of Soldiers and their Families through mentorship and training.

The guest speaker for the event was Command Sgt. Maj. Brandon J. Vargas, command sergeant major of 710th Brigade Sustainment Battalion, 3rd BCT, 10th Mtn Div. As he addressed the crowd, Vargas challenged the inductees to continue practicing selfless service and rise above self-centered leadership.

"Serve others by working toward their development and well-being in order to meet goals for the common good," said Vargas. "Distance yourself from using positional power and influence to serve yourself. Instead, gravitate to a position where power and influence empower, enable, and encourage people within your sphere of influence."

During the ceremony, the inductees recited the biography of Murphy and were presented with the club's medallion.

Olympic

Continued from page 4

ing to attend the qualifier. Unfortunately, she didn't place well in that competition because of a newly implemented rule that took points away from competitors when they stepped out of bounds. Many of the competitors weren't made aware of the rule until they had violated it.

"Thankfully, prior to that, I already won two Olympic qualifiers online, due to COVID, and I still hold enough points to be a high ranking competitor in the national qualifier."

Pritchard is now stationed at Al Asad Airbase in Iraq where she will be until early 2022, complicating her drive to qualify for the Olympics. Pritchard is in a good position, but she's facing tough female competition in the United States.

"Balancing a deployment and my Olym-

pic dream is proving to be difficult the further I go. However, going on a deployment has been another goal of mine since I joined the Army. I didn't want to end my military service without going on a deployment," said Pritchard. "This is my first deployment and I am passionate about my job. I know I could have said no and just focused on the Olympics, but this deployment is just as important to me as my Olympic dream."

Pritchard said she believes it's possible to serve her country and also have the honor of being called an Olympian. She wants to prove that it is possible and inspire others to do the same, even if there are difficulties in her situation. She said she greatly appreciates that her command continues to support her.

It's too early to say whether her Olympic

dreams will come true. Regardless, she has achieved great things in the Army National Guard: A UH-60 Black Hawk helicopter mechanic, a UH-60 Black Hawk Technical Inspector, the only female flight instructor in the Alaska National Guard and an Honor Graduate for the Flight Instructor course (the only one in the State of Alaska).

"If you dedicate yourself with enough discipline, you can serve your country, be an outstanding Soldier and achieve your dreams," she said.

"Her goal is to be an Olympian. I am hoping to secure a spot on the national team," said Pritchard. "No matter what, I will not stop training. I was doing this before they announced that breaking would be part of the Olympics. That's what I do. I'm a very driven individual, that's who I am."

Community

BJACH holds drive-thru COVID-19 vaccination event

By JEAN CLAVETTE GRAVES
BJACH PAO

FORT POLK, La. — Bayne-Jones Army Community Hospital conducted a drive-thru COVID-19 vaccination event May 22, at the Joint Readiness Training Center and Fort Polk. The vaccine was offered to everyone in the surrounding community, not just TRICARE beneficiaries or ID card holders. In less than four hours, 124 people received their first dose of the COVID-19 vaccine.

Spc. Glen Strobach, 317th Engineer Battalion, 3rd Brigade Combat Team, 10th Mountain Division, and his wife Savanna, were the first in line to get vaccinated.

Glen Strobach said they waited to get vaccinated because he and his wife are both healthy and initially, the vaccine was not available to them.

"I was unable to get the shot initially because I didn't have underlying conditions and I'm not a first responder," he said. "Then I had to receive another vaccine for medical readiness which prevented me from getting this one sooner."

Staff Sgt. Ethan Shjamdemaar, 2nd Battalion, 2nd Infantry Regiment, 3rd BCT, 10th Mtn Div, was taking care of one of his Soldiers Saturday morning and decided to get vaccinated while he was out and about.

"I waited to get vaccinated because as a young, healthy person, I knew there were others who needed it more than I did," he said. "Once it became available to everyone, I knew I wanted to get it right away."

Nurses from the primary care medical home and immunizations clinic at BJACH were screening participants and administering the vaccine.

Kimberly Jones, licensed practical nurse, thought the drive-thru event was a great idea.

"More people have the opportunity to get vaccinated in this setting," she said. "People have obligations with kids and work during normal daytime hours. Having this on a Saturday gave people the chance to get vaccinated around their busy schedules."

Marivel Clayton, licensed practical nurse from BJACH, has been on the COVID-19 team since the vaccine first became available at JRTC and Fort Polk.

"It's important to get vaccinated to get rid of COVID-19," she said. "The number



Maj. ANDREA KELLY/3RD, BCT, 10th MTN DIV



JEAN CLAVETTE GRAVES/BJACH PAO

Above: Staff Sgt. Ethan Shjamdemaar, 2nd Battalion, 2nd Infantry Regiment, 3rd Brigade Combat Team, 10th Mountain Division, displays his vaccination record after being the first person vaccinated during the drive-thru COVID-19 vaccination event on May 22.

Left: Maj. Ellen Jones and Marivel Clayton discuss patient concerns before administering the first dose of the Moderna COVID-19 vaccine during the drive-thru COVID-19 vaccination event on May 22.

of cases has significantly dropped since we started getting vaccinated. We all want to get back to our normal lives and getting vaccinated is the way to do it."

BJACH has been administering the Moderna vaccine since the emergency use authorization on Dec. 18.

According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, the messenger RNA vaccine triggers an immune response that teaches the body to protect against future infections.

Maj. Ellen Jones, medical doctor of emergency medicine for BJACH, wants skeptics to know that the technology used to develop this messenger RNA (ribonucleic acid) vaccine has been around nearly 30 years. She said these vaccines can be developed in a laboratory, use readily available materials

and can be standardized quickly.

"The science behind this vaccine is very well documented and studied," she said. "I was a skeptic at first and read all of the studies and the history behind this technology. I have come to the conclusion that it is a modern medical miracle."

Jones said this technology has been researched extensively and she wished people would focus on how amazing it is.

"If you compare this to the flu vaccine with a 45-65 percent efficacy, for example, this vaccine is 95% effective," she said. "Statistically, this just shoots every other vaccine out of the water. I believe this is the way of the future for vaccines."

She said she is excited to see what other viruses will be contained using this technology.

Stress relief: Understanding key elements to mental health

By CLAUDIA SANCHEZ-BUSTAMANTE
Mental Health System communications

FALLS CHURCH, VA. — Stress has become a common part of people's lives, especially in a fast-paced world where people try to balance work, family and life to succeed in meeting goals and obligations.

Although short bursts of stress can be positive drivers to keep you safe in moments of danger or push you to meet a deadline, excessive, continuous stress limits a person's ability to function properly over the long term and can have [detrimental effects](#) in overall health, according to the National Institutes of Health.

For Mental Health Awareness Month, the Military Health System focuses on healthy ways to relieve stress.

Two service members shared their perspectives about how they relieve stress — whether by seeking professional help and support when needed or by engaging in stress-relieving activities — to remain resilient and healthy.

Air Force 1st Lt. Thi Lua is a mental health nurse at Brooke Army Medical Center in Fort Sam Houston, Texas. As a mom, service member, and mental health provider, she understands the value of mental health firsthand.

"It is imperative to recognize stress or multiple stressors and find coping skills to help alleviate each trigger," she said. "Stress is the No. 1 culprit in exacerbating dormant illnesses and develop new acute illness."

For Lua, finding ways to relieve stress is important in preventing it from affecting a person's job and mission, as well as the huge impact stress has on personal life.

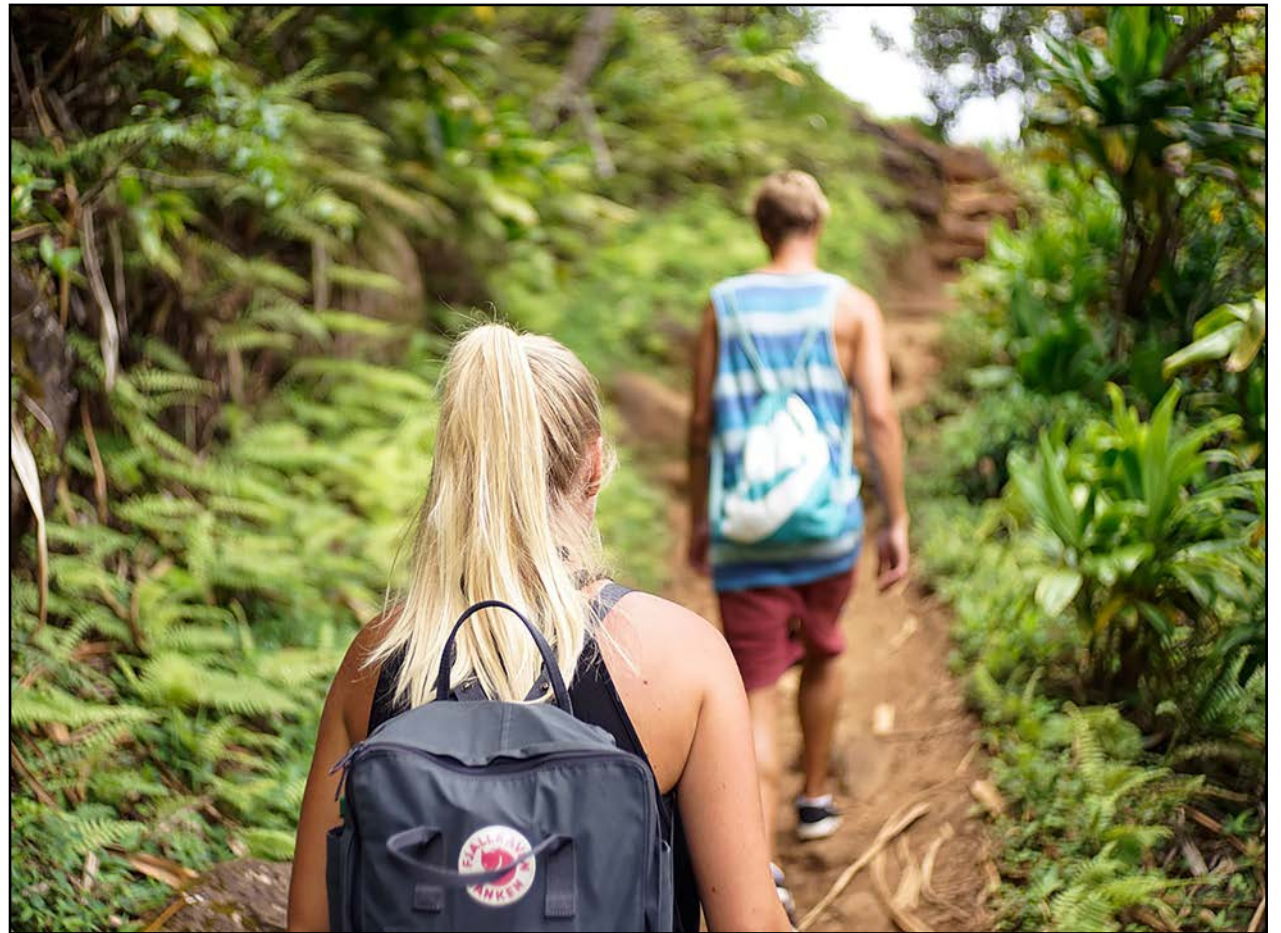
"To help me cope with everyday stressors, I like to go on hikes with my family at least twice a month and enjoy weekly visits to the park with my kids," she said. "I also enjoy playing chess with my son and Sudoku any time I have 15 minutes to spare."

On the occasion that none of those activities helps relieve her feelings of stress, she said sitting alone in a quiet place can help decrease her anxiety most of the time.

She is also aware that showing her kids how to deal with stressors in a positive way sets a good example.

"It's very important to show them healthy ways of dealing with stress or anything that bothers them, as they see and do what I do," she said.

For Army 1st Lt. Nicole Barth, a clinical nurse at Fort Carson's Evans Community Hospital in Colorado Springs, Colorado,



her faith keeps her grounded.

"It helps me be realistic with how big my problems are compared to others," she said, "and assists me to maintain a strong appreciation for a work-life balance."

In addition, Barth also engages in physical activities and surrounds herself with a support network.

"I love to be active, whether that means hiking, traveling, or playing football — I play on a woman's professional tackle football team," she said. "I have a very strong support system consisting of civilian and military friends that I reach out to frequently — they listen to me when I need to vent."

Many times, however, professional guidance and support can provide better solutions. The Department of Defense has several resources available for personnel to get support, including the [Military Crisis Line](#), which offers confidential, 24/7 support via text-messaging, online chat and phone service, and the [Real Warriors campaign](#), which advocates to reduce the stigma of mental health care in the military.

"Real Warriors is the DoD's official anti-stigma campaign around mental health care and mental-health care seeking," said Nicholas Polizzi, who holds a doctorate in psychology and serves at the Defense Health Agency's [Psychological Health Center of Excellence](#). The campaign's goals include "increasing the literacy, education

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Take note of tips

By KEVIN GOKE
BJACH Behavioral Health chief

FORT POLK, La. — In recognition of Mental Health Awareness Month, Bayne-Jones Army Community hospital wants you to check out the following mental health awareness tips:

- One in five people experience mental illness during their lifetime, but everyone faces challenges in life that can impact their mental health and wellness.

- COVID-19 impacted the nation's mental health and, potentially, the military's overall state of readiness. Mental health care is as important as physical health care especially as we all recover from this lengthy pandemic.

- Anger and frustration are complicated emotions that can stem from disappointment, fear, trauma, isolation and stress. Taking steps to decrease overall tension can prevent feelings from spiraling out of control.

- During tough times, negative thoughts can make life feel out of control. Taking time to do things like reading a book, hiking or calling someone you haven't talked to in a while helps.

Summer heatwaves affect stormwater pollution

By EMILY MCGRUDER
DPW-ENRMD-CMB

When thinking of water pollution, images of sea life swimming through plastic or agriculture fertilizer runoff likely come to mind. These examples are more observable and increasingly pressing forms of water pollution that tend to be the focus of environmental activism.

However, there is another, less talked about threat to waterways: Thermal pollution.

Thermal pollution is the degradation of water quality due to unnatural changes in water temperature. While artificial increase and decrease of water temperature are considered thermal pollution, stormwater generally warms receiving water bodies, and therefore warming thermal pollution will be the focus. This type of pollution often goes unmentioned when discussing stormwater.

However, with summer heat soon to be in full blaze, it is essential to remember the environmental effects of sudden water temperature changes and how stormwater systems can help.

Slight increases in temperature can have a drastic impact on the ecology of lakes, rivers, streams and even oceans. Warmer water temperatures decrease dissolved oxygen concentration, leading to the suffocation of marine wildlife. Wildlife reproduction is also affected by warmer water tempera-



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tures. The heat can kill eggs adapted to cooler temperatures and cause premature release of eggs, increasing abnormal development. Temperature changes that are too drastic and too sudden can lead to mass deaths in plants, insects, amphibians, and fish due to thermal shock. If this were to occur at the outlet of a stormwater system, the killing of vegetation could cause dramatic erosion, requiring expensive reconstruction. While some species may be able to adapt quickly enough to sustain their pop-

ulation, some degree of biodiversity is lost.

How can you help? Consider creating a rain garden or plant additional grass. This helps prevent future stormwater warming because the absorbed water can later evaporate and cool the surface.

This process prevents the ground from getting hot enough to warm stormwater that would lead to thermal pollution in the first place. Remember “only rain in the drain” this summer to help prevent stormwater pollution.

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and understanding of psychological health or health topics and increasing access points to care, particularly for those who don't know how to engage in behavioral health.”

As in the case of the Military Crisis Line, Real Warriors is for the entire DoD community, including veterans, active-duty service members, Coast Guard, reserves, their Family members, their providers or clinicians, their leaders, and those who care about them, said Polizzi.

For Lua, getting evidence-based, professional mental health treatment is an important aspect to maintaining her overall health.

“I see my therapist at least once every two weeks and also see a psychiatrist twice a month regarding progress or effectiveness of my current treatment and just to make sure I'm doing well,” she said. “They educate or introduce new ways for me to help

cope with issues I'm dealing with.”

This is important for her because it is an unbiased source of support that helps her in two ways.

“I don't know them personally and they are not connected to my job, so there is confidentiality that makes me feel secure to express myself,” she said. “Second, having professional guidance reinforces that what I am going through is not rare and there are things that can reduce my anxiety.”

In his role leading the Real Warriors campaign, Polizzi works to “normalize psychological health care as every day health care.”

“We understand that we experience various symptoms which may or may not be related to a mental health issue,” he said.

“But we know that treatment works — for the vast majority, the right type of treatment helps you feel better. Getting the right

treatment also means the military is going to get the very best you,” he said.

Lua echoed his thoughts: “Mental health treatment is important because not all patients are successful in dealing with life and its many stressors without help,” she said. “Without a mind, the body does not exist.”

Her message to those who are reticent about seeking mental health care is, “you are not alone.”

“If they feel uncomfortable reaching out to a suicide hotline, chaplain or other resources,” Lua said, “support groups can pave a way to find and connect with people feeling the same way they are.”

Barth said not everyone's coping mechanisms are the same but talking to a professional can help you find what works best for you. “Please give yourself some self-love and make yourself a priority,” she said.