

THE DISPATCH



APRIL 2018

OFFICIAL MAGAZINE OF THE TEXAS MILITARY DEPARTMENT

ONLY THE BEST

**GUARDSMEN AND INTERNATIONAL PARTNERS
COMPETE TO FIND THE BEST WARRIOR**



(TOP) Maj. Gen. John F. Nichols, the adjutant general for Texas and Brig. Gen. Patrick Hamilton, assistant division commander – maneuver welcome a new partner, the incoming Commander in Chief for the Chilean Army Gen. Ricardo Martínez. The Texas National Guard partners with the Chilean Armed Forces through the State Partnership Program which allows the National Guard to partner with allied nations, like Chile, to strengthen relationships and interoperability, enhance military capabilities and increase cultural awareness and professional skills among U.S. military personnel and their counterparts. (Chilean Army photo by Ramón Otarola)

(BOTTOM) Maj. Gen. John F. Nichols, the adjutant general for Texas meets with General del Aire Jorge Robles, Commander-in-Chief of the Chilean Air Force. (Chilean Army photo by Ramón Otarola)



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April DISPATCH

- 4 From the Top
- 6 Best Warrior
- 10 Emergency Tracking Training
- 12 Sole Female Best Warrior
- 14 Texas Employers Support Guard
- 15 Air Traffic Award
- 16 Multilingual
- 18 Army's Best Shot
- 20 French Commando Course
- 22 Our Force

(ON THE COVER)

Texas Military Department Soldiers with the 36th Infantry Division showed their strength and knowledge in the Best Warrior competition at Camp Swift, near Bastrop, Texas. (U.S. Army National Guard Photo by Staff Sgt. Mark Scovell, 36th Infantry Division Public Affairs)

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TEXAS MILITARY DEPARTMENT

FROM THE TOP

COMMENTARIES FROM TEXAS MILITARY DEPARTMENT LEADERS



BRIG. GEN. DAWN M. FERRELL
DEPUTY ADJUTANT GENERAL - AIR

REMEMBER WHY YOU SERVE

The genesis of most military careers is the same. It starts with a young recruit, butterflies fluttering in their stomach, standing tall with their right hand raised taking a solemn oath to defend the constitution, the document that provided freedom for a nation.

I still get goosebumps when I remember the day I said those words and made that promise. Preserving freedom was indeed (and still is) a worthy cause. As a young service member, those lofty moments were enough to keep me driven and fully engaged, fighting the good fight.

Like many of you, as I've progressed in my military career, the day-to-day grind of keeping this giant machine running has taken a toll. Couple this tedium with high-stress moments when the people of Texas and the nation are counting on you to deliver safety from both enemies of freedom and the ravages of mother nature, the days can get long.

If you stay long enough, you will eventually find yourself asking: What am I doing here? If you find yourself asking this, I would challenge you to take a look back at the day you entered service and re-frame the question. Instead, ask yourself this: Why does the Texas Military Department need me?

As I look across the force, the answer to that question is easy.

You are the parents, who care deeply for their children. We need people like that. You are the dedicated, honest and faithful citizens who reflect American values. You are the few who are fit, mentally and physically for the fight, and we need people like that. You are the hard-working, educated professionals that make the world go around.

You are the humanitarians, both compassionate and conscientious, who care for the people of the state and country. We need people like that. The Texas Military Department needs you!

Your service to Texas and the United States has certainly tested those intrinsic qualities and values. Unlike many other professions though, this family of arms never dulls those characteristics. Every day requires us to strengthen those traits, fortifying ourselves for the work we do.

If you take a moment for self-examination, you will find the person you are looking at is stronger, more resilient and has more capabilities and capacities than the bright-eyed youth who took that oath all those years ago could ever imagine.

There will undoubtedly be more trying times, more nights and weekends away from family and more tasks that test our capabilities. But as you stand up to face those tests, take just a moment to recapture that vigor and shiver of excitement that you entered the service with. Think about the larger mission of preserving something precious for generations to come and reflect on your own growth as a service member that makes you the perfect person for the job.

These are increasingly busy times for the Texas Military Department. The governor and the president increasingly rely on Guardsmen to be a ready force that can conquer the many challenges that lie ahead. As I survey the people around me, I am more confident than ever that we have an organization that has the right people for the complex, and sometimes thankless work, that allows the Texas Military Department to exceed expectations when called upon.

We all came to this organization for different reasons, but we have grown together, and I personally thank each and every one of you for being a prized member of the Texas Military Department. My heart swells with pride when I think of all the work you have done and the sacrifices you have made. Your dedication, commitment and service mean everything to me – and to our nation.

Here is our promise as your leadership: you take care of the mission...and we'll take care of you. **- FROM THE TOP -**

4 TheDISPATCH APRIL 2018

TEXAS MILITARY DEPARTMENT

“This competition has shown me the similarities between forces and how they operate,” said Hronek. “I feel proud to serve and represent my country abroad.”

The competition enabled competitors to refine their skills and learn from their counterparts.

“At the end of the day this is an event that brings Texas together with two separate countries that we are part-

nered with,” Dyer said. “Together they learn from each other and benefit from training and different techniques and ways that we can lead our Soldiers and operate in the environments that we are in.”

The winner of the competition will be announced at a banquet in April. Competitors from both Chile and the Czech Republic will be invited back for the ceremony. **-D**

After four days of competition, an Air Guardsman shoots the M9 pistol during the mystery event. The mystery event rounded out the 3-days of competition and conclude with stress-fire lanes with both the M4 and M9. (U.S. Army National Guard photo by Sgt. Mark Otte)



8 TheDISPATCH APRIL 2018

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TEXAS MILITARY DEPARTMENT



Barfield said that he was brought to tears when one of the children he had interpreted for drew him a picture to thank him for making their stay more bearable.

For another Texas State Guardsman, it was his knowledge of Spanish that helped place a frightened young boy at ease when carrying him to a rescue boat.

"If time is of the essence and English skills are limited, providing direction and guidance in their language gives them confidence that we will get their family to safety," said Master Sgt. Robert Lewis, 3rd Battalion, Texas Maritime Regiment.

While the size and geographic diversity of the state makes it a melting pot, guardsman like Cpl. Zaw Maung of the 19th Regiment, who speaks Burmese, become a critical language asset during a times of need. Maung used Burmese with shelter guests at the NRG Stadium in Houston during Hurricane Harvey. He created signs and gave announcements in Burmese and worked as a translator at a help desk.

"If I had not been in the Texas State Guard, I would not have been in the position to help this community," said Maung. "Communicating in my native tongue made the Burmese guests feel a little better during a most distressful time because of the hurricane."

During Operation Lone Star, the largest medical humanitarian operation in the country and mass casualty training exercise in the Rio Grande Valley, Capt. Margarita Elestwani, Texas Medical Brigade, assisted patients and physicians through her ability to communicate medical terms in Spanish, Tagalog and French. Another Texas Medical Brigade member at the training exercise, who also speaks Tagalog, Capt. Abram Braza, 2nd Battalion, used his ability to communicate in the Filipino dialect to reunite a lost elderly Filipino man with his family.

Although those with multilingual skillsets help serve fellow Texans, there are times these language capabilities also help communicate with the members of the media and dignitary visitors, further enhancing the delivery of needed messaging. For Staff Sgt. Gregory Illich, 1st Battalion, 8th Regiment, his Spanish fluency enabled him to serve as an interpreter when a Chilean military delegation observed OLS.

"One member of the Chilean delegation gave me a challenge coin for assisting them and I gave him my Texas flag patch from my uniform," said Illich. "I was honored to be able to use my fluency in Spanish to assist the Rio Grande Valley community as well as act as interpreter for our Chilean guests." **-D**

www.tmd.texas.gov 17

TEXAS MILITARY DEPARTMENT

MULTILINGUAL

STATE GUARD LANGUAGE SKILLS AID IN DISASTER RESPONSE

*Story By: Capt. Esperanza Meza
Texas State Guard Public Affairs*

AUSTIN, Texas - Whether rescuing families and pets from flooded homes, lending a helping hand to parents and children who need a place to sleep in a shelter or distributing basic necessities and medical care during a natural disaster or emergency, the Texas State Guard knows that communicating with people is vital to every mission. When every minute counts these guardsmen do not want language to become a barrier for getting their fellow Texans help.

Texas State Guard Sgt. Allen Barnfield, 2nd Battalion, 19th Regiment, decided to learn American Sign Language because he wanted to assist people who could not hear. Last summer when Hurricane Harvey displaced tens-of thousands of residents, he used his sign language skills to communicate with eleven evacuees at shelters.

“Being able to interpret for the deaf evacuees made me realize how important it is to be able to communicate with them,” he said. “The fact that I could provide them with information through sign language made them feel much better about staying in the shelter.”



(Page 16) Sgt. Allen Barnfield, 19th Regiment, Texas State Guard, communicates using sign language with a shelter guest during Hurricane Harvey at Athens Elementary School, San Antonio, Texas, August 27, 2017. (Texas State Guard photo by Capt. Esperanza Meza)

(Page 17) Master Sgt. Robert Lewis, 3rd Battalion, Texas Maritime Regiment, Texas State Guard, helps a young boy and his family during Hurricane Harvey boat rescue operations in Houston, Texas, August 27, 2017. (U.S. Army National Guard photo by Sgt. Samuel De Leon)

16 TheDISPATCH APRIL 2018

TEXAS MILITARY DEPARTMENT

Shelter, 40 guardsmen practiced registering evacuees and tracking their movements from the simulated evacuation site at the university to the shelter. To make the exercise as real as possible, both pets, medical and mobility equipment were required to be evacuated and tracked.

"The objective of our training today is to give guardsmen hands-on experience using ETN so that we are ready to provide to our fellow Texans effective assistance during an emergency or disaster," said Texas State Guard 1st Sgt. Charles Sumner.

Walker County Judge Danny Pierce stressed the importance of training with the Texas State Guard and emergency management agencies.

"During Hurricanes Rita and Katrina, we sheltered 150,000 evacuees along the I-45 corridor within Walker County," said Pierce. "At that time we did not have a way to track the movement of evacuees. So we lost people, and we couldn't find them. The Texas State Guard turned out in huge numbers for this ETN exercise which raised our comfort level knowing that we have these guys behind us in an emergency."

The Walker County Office of Emergency Management coordinated the exercise which also included the Walker County Community Emergency Response Team, the Walker County Sheriff's Department, Huntsville Independent School District, the Walker County Animal Issues Group and the Southeast Texas Regional Advisory Council. **-D**



(Page 10) Pfc. James Little and Pfc. Lee McWilliams, 2nd Battalion, 8th Regiment, Texas State Guard, scan an Emergency Tracking Network (ETN) identification wristband on a volunteer, role playing as an evacuee, and on her dog during a training exercise with Walker County Office of Emergency Management in Huntsville, Texas, February 24, 2018. The Texas State Guard is trained on ETN which helps to track the location of evacuees and pets during an emergency or disaster.

(Page 11) Pvt. Johnathan Winston, 2nd Battalion, 8th Regiment, Texas State Guard, applies an Emergency Tracking Network (ETN) identification band on the wrist of a volunteer, who is role-playing as an evacuee, during a training exercise in Huntsville, Texas, February 24, 2018. The 8th Regiment was part of an ETN training exercise with Walker County emergency management agencies.



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OUR FORCE

PFC DOMINIC NEDELSKYI

Texas Army National Guard

Attended the 2018 Best Warrior Competition Alongside his fellow Citizen Soldiers, Airmen, and international partners from the Czech Republic and Republic of Chile





Sgt. Justus Densmore (Middle) fires the one-handed pistol event at the All-Army Small Arms Championship at Fort Benning, Georgia. Densmore has been shooting with the National Guard since 2014. (Courtesy photo)

His shooting accomplishment with those teams has made him one of the Texas shooting team's "go-to guys", Densmore said.

The competition in Georgia, hosted by the Maneuver Center of Excellence, left the high-dollar match-grade weapons behind and required the use of pistols and rifles that might be issued to any soldier headed into combat, something Densmore said he was a little rusty with.

"Going into the match, I had no idea I would win," he said. "I hadn't been practicing with rack-grade weapons in the last several months, and was really just along for the ride."

Before packing his bags for the match, though, Densmore did what he always does: pray and practice the fundamentals.

"I always focus on practicing the fundamentals prior to a match," he said. "Once you have those down you can apply them to any match you might shoot."

While the competition pits different components of the Army against each other for bragging rights as the Army's best shot, Densmore said that it also brings the components closer.

"We are all just Soldiers," Densmore said. "We train the same. We fight the same. We wear the same uniform. At this competition, it doesn't matter if you are active duty, Guard or Reserve." **-D**

TEXAS MILITARY DEPARTMENT

them in mental and physical fully blown tests to see how they react under pressure and stress.”

The importance of the relationship between the Texas National Guard, the Czech and Chilean armed forces is being able to predict the thoughts and processes of a partner nation, allowing them to work in unison, Dyer said.

The inclusion of foreign forces is part of the TMD State Partnership Program, which is partnered with the Czech Republic and Chile. The program facilitates cooperation across all aspects of international civil-military affairs and encouraging people-to-people ties at the state level.

For Staff Sgt. Juan Domingo Silva, a Marine with the Chilean Navy, this was his first time participating in a multinational event.

“The physical aspect has been challenging but we’ve trained for similar events in Chile,” said Silva.

The competition meant much more than just winning, it meant representing his country and learning to adapt to a different environment and culture, Silva said.

The program provided Chilean service members with a bilingual sponsor to help with the language barrier during the competition.

“The culture exchange experience has been valuable,” said Texas Army National Guard Spc. Manuel Najera, Alpha Company, 536th Brigade Support Battalion. Najera served as Silva’s sponsor.

“The most challenging part has been adapting to the Chilean-Spanish dialect,” Najera said.

Sgt. Jan Hronek, a Czech Republic service member also said interacting with other multinational service members increased his cultural awareness.

(Page 6) Member of the Czech Republic military participating in the Texas Military Department’s Best Warrior Competition on Mar. 4. Participants were tested with a mystery event that included low crawling in a gas mask. (U.S. Army National Guard Photo by Sgt. Mark Otte)

(Page 7) Member of the Chilean Military Participates in the Texas Military Department’s Best Warrior Competition. Competitors faced four days of grueling physical and mental tests designed to establish the groups best warrior. (U.S. Army National Guard Photo by Sgt. Mark Otte)



www.tmd.texas.gov 7

TEXAS MILITARY DEPARTMENT

TEXAS GUARDSMAN IS ARMY'S BEST SHOT



*Story By: Sgt. Mark Otte
Texas Military Department Public Affairs*

FORT BENNING, Georgia – A heavy equipment operator from the Texas National Guard's 551st Multi-Role Bridge Company out of El Campo, Texas took home top honors at the U.S. Army Small Arms Championship in mid-March, 2018 at Fort Benning.

Sgt. Justus Densmore, a Bay City, Texas native and resident, bested a field of shooters from across the Army that included active-duty soldiers, Guardsmen, Reservists and West Point and ROTC cadets, shooting both rifles and pistols, to take the All Army Small Arms Championship home to the Texas Army National Guard.

Competitors shot in four individual rifle events, hitting targets at distances up to 500 yards. The competition tested shooters by varying shooting positions and the time allowed to engage targets. To replicate conditions often found in combat, participants had to run up to 100 yards before taking a shooting position and pulling the trigger.

Four pistol events rounded out the contest, challenging contestants with varying distances, times and shooting techniques.

"For this match, my strength was my rifle," Densmore said. "I hadn't been training with the M9 pistol in the last few months and that hindered my pistol scores some."

Densmore, who joined the Texas National Guard in 2011, has been shooting competitively with the organization since 2012. In 2014 Densmore was selected for the All Guard Service Rifle Team and the All Guard Combat Team. Those teams draw the best shooters from across the United States to represent the National Guard at shooting matches.

18 **TheDISPATCH** APRIL 2018



*Capt. Penelope Haussler
36th Combat Aviation Brigade*

Employers following a ride on a UH-60 Black Hawk helicopter and the flight crew. More than 15 employers representing businesses from across the state of Texas were recognized for supporting their Texas Army National Guard employees during Employer Day at Martindale Army Airfield in San Antonio, Texas, March 3, 2018. (U.S. Army National Guard Courtesy Photo)

SAN ANTONIO – Civilian employers of Texas Army National Guardsmen were invited to attend an event, March 3, at Martindale Army Airfield in San Antonio, to celebrate the sacrifices they make to support their citizen-Soldiers.

The Texas Army National Guard, partnered alongside the Employer Support of the Guard and Reserve, an official agency of the Department of Defense, welcomed more than 15 employers representing businesses from across the state of Texas.

The Employer Day kicked off with a welcome breakfast where Texas Army National Guard Lt. Col. Jose Reyes, commander of Charlie Company, 2nd General Support Aviation Battalion, 149th Aviation Regiment, 36th Combat Aviation Brigade, 36th Infantry Division, emphasized the importance of employer support for National Guardsmen.

“The strength of our nation is due to the strength of our Army. The strength of the Army is due to the strength of our Soldiers,” said Reyes. “The strength of the Soldiers

is due to the strength of their families and the strength of their employers.”

Reyes went on to explain the rigorous requirements the aviators, crew chiefs, medics, as well as other various support staff, have to keep in order to maintain their licenses, in many cases, the same standards imposed on their Active Duty counterparts.

Employers were ushered around the flight facility where they learned about the intricacies of each major process. They learned about the helicopter fueling process with the Heavy Expanded Mobility Tactical Truck from the petroleum specialists, toured the maintenance hangar, listened in on air traffic chatter in the flight operations area, as well as the Mobile Tower System and tested out aviation pilot equipment. Following a Meal Ready to Eat lunch, employers were treated to an experience in the sky aboard a UH-60 Black Hawk helicopter.

“The experience, hospitality and knowledge was so superior,” one employer said. “There must be some way for more people to be educated about what the Army does to keep us safe.” **-D**



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BEST WARRIOR

BATTLE FOR BEST WARRIOR IN TEXAS TITLE HELPS BUILD INTERNATIONAL PARTNERSHIPS

*Story by: Spc. Gerardo Escobar
100th Mobile Public Affairs Detachment*

The joint competition provided an opportunity for cultural exchange as well as enhanced military capabilities in a friendly but competitive environment.

"With our state partnerships, the Czech Republic and Chile, we trade technical expertise, leadership and values on how they may operate and how we may operate with tactics and techniques," said Command Sgt. Maj.

Kristopher Dyer, Senior Enlisted Advisor of the Texas Army National Guard.

This year's best warrior competition brought together 28 candidates who competed in nine rated events that closely imitated real-life and combat situations.

"Everything within the competition is scenario based to where they would be able to participate in a combat environment or a real-world exercise," Dyer said. "We put

6 **TheDISPATCH** APRIL 2018

TEXAS MILITARY DEPARTMENT



TEXAS GUARDSMEN GRADUATE FROM FRENCH DESERT COMMANDO COURSE

*Story by: Sgt. Jason L. Robertson
3-144th Infantry Regiment Public Affairs*

Texas Guardsmen graduate from French desert commando course

DJIBOUTI - Task Force Bayonet assigned to Combined Joint Task Force-Horn of Africa at Camp Lemonnier, Djibouti in Africa, sent two groups of Soldiers to the French Desert Commando Course beginning in November 2017 at the camp.

The course exposed troops to the fundamentals of desert combat, desert survival, weapons training, troop movements and obstacle courses based on mountain and water environments. Other parts of the course taught students survival cooking, trap setting, to locate water sources and other skills that could save lives in a desert environment.

The desert-combat training helped Soldiers become better suited for operations with other countries' military forces in many different environments. The training showed American and French troops how to overcome language and cultural barriers to improve tactics and joint-operation outcomes.

The first group to attempt the course consisted of 30 combat arms Soldiers, of which all 30 graduated, earning the French Desert Combat Badge. The second, a more diverse

group that started in January 2018, included 17 combat support personnel, a Chaplain, a Judge Advocate General, and 4 combat arms Soldiers and saw all 21 Soldiers graduate

"I believe it is good for all non-combat personnel, specifically JAGs, to participate in combat arms training," said Captain Dustin L. Banks a judge advocate general for Headquarters and Headquarters Company, 3rd Battalion, 144th Infantry Regiment. "I benefited tremendously in seeing how legal frameworks such as the rules of engagement are applied in an operational environment."

The French Desert Combat Course is oriented toward combat arms Soldiers, so seeing the combat support Soldiers to go through the course and graduate, gave combat arms Soldiers new confidence in the support personnel. Now, combat arms Soldiers can focus on and complete the mission given to them without worrying about support personnel being able to keep up.

"As a Chaplain, my ability to provide religious support to Soldiers, particularly warfighters, is contingent upon my relationship with them," said Capt. Jason M. Huntington the chaplain for the regiment. "Completing a course that is known to be difficult, not only motivates others to do the same, but gives me credibility with the Soldiers I support. After all, if the Chaplain can do it, anyone can, right!)"-D

20 TheDISPATCH APRIL 2018

TEXAS MILITARY DEPARTMENT



AIR NATIONAL GUARD FIELDS SOLE FEMALE COMPETITOR FOR BEST WARRIOR

*Story by: Staff Sgt. Kristina Overton
136th Airlift Wing Public Affairs*

BASTROP, Texas - Of the more than 3,200 Airmen currently serving in the Texas Air National Guard, only eight were selected to compete at Camp Swift as part of the 2018 Texas Military Department Best Warrior Competition. Among the selectees, Tech. Sgt. Jennifer Brown, 273rd Cyber Operations Squadron education and training specialist, Texas Air National Guard, stood out from her peers chosen to participate. Not just for her skill and abilities in qualifying to represent her unit, but also as the only female competitor overall.

Tech. Sgt. Jennifer Brown, 273rd Cyber Operations Squadron education and training specialist, Texas Air National Guard, serves as the sole female contestant in the 2018 Best Warrior Competition held on March 1, 2018 near Bastrop, Texas. (U.S. Air National Guard photo: Staff Sgt. Agustin Salazar)

12 / **TheDISPATCH** APRIL 2018

TEXAS MILITARY DEPARTMENT

TEXAS STATE GUARD PARTNERS WITH WALKER COUNTY TO TRAIN ON EMERGENCY TRACKING NETWORK



*Story & Photos By: Sgt. Chris Feriante
Texas State Guard Public Affairs*

HUNTSVILLE, Texas – Texas State Guardsmen from the 2nd Battalion, 8th Regiment, partnered with local and state emergency management agencies, February 24, 2018 to practice and rehearse combined operation capabilities in Huntsville in preparation for the 2018 hurricane season.

The Texas State Guard, in coordination with Walker County Emergency Management, Texas Division of Emergency Management and Sam Houston State University Emergency Management, participated in a joint evacuation exercise to strengthen skills using the Emergency Tracking Network system. Operating the ETN is one of the Texas State Guard's mission-essential tasks.

"We are focused on this exercise as both a training opportunity for our guardsmen to use the ETN system and as an opportunity to build a strong relationship with the Walker County emergency management folks and the Huntsville community," said Lt. Col. Arthur Levesque, 2nd battalion commander.

The ETN provides a network to maintain accountability of evacuees throughout a disaster; from the time they board evacuation mass transit, to their arrival at a shelter and finally back to where they board the mass transit after a storm. Each evacuee is given a yellow wrist band which has an identification number unique to each individual. Family pets, as well as medical and mobility devices, are also banded and can be tracked together.

With students from Sam Houston State University acting as evacuees being transported to the Walker County Emergency

ARROWHEAD SOLDIER EARNS AIR TRAFFIC CONTROLLER OF THE YEAR

Capt. Penelope Haussler
36th Combat Aviation Brigade

FORT RUCKER, Alabama - The Army Aviation Association of America awarded Texas Army National Guard Staff Sgt. Alvin Long, an air traffic controller with 2nd Battalion, 149th Aviation Regiment, 36th Combat Aviation Brigade, 36th Infantry Division, the 2017 Air Traffic Control Controller of the Year Award during an awards dinner held during the Army Aviation Senior Leader Conference at Fort Rucker, Alabama, Jan. 31, 2018.

According to the official award citation, Long's direction and leadership in non-conventional tactical air traffic services provided "over 5,000 individual aircraft movements and 300 cargo air drops in addition to supporting multiple parachute jumps and special operations training exercises."

Long served as the Landing Zone Mobile Tower System Facility Chief and Examiner in a northern Iraq airfield. There, he was instrumental to the success of introducing the first ever tactical employment of the tower system into a combat environment, providing direct support to the Joint Special Operations Aviation Detachment.

Long oversaw a range of aircraft movements to include: unmanned aircraft systems, surveillance, reconnaissance, assault, lift and direct strike assets conducting multiple combat missions in the fight against the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant as a part of Operation Inherent Resolve.

The Air Traffic Controller of the Year award recognized Long for his talent and drive; however, he credits his success to his team.

"It is truly an honor to be awarded. However, it is only because I had an amazing team that wanted to work and do things right," said Long. "I have had the best mentors and a leadership that you want to work for. Plus, none of this would even be possible if I didn't have the support and strength of my wife Juliet. This award is a testament to all of them." **-D**



Staff Sgt. Alvin Long (right) with Col. Mark Beckler, commander of the 29th Combat Aviation Brigade, Maryland Army National Guard, after Long was awarded the Army Aviation Association of America 2017 Air Traffic Controller of the Year award. The award is presented annually to a selected air traffic controller who has performed or contributed commendably to air traffic control during the awards period.
(U.S. Army National Guard Courtesy Photo)

www.tmd.texas.gov 15

“Competing seemed like a great opportunity,” said Brown. “For me, it wasn’t an imitation factor. I used to be a Marine and I remember every year my commander would send out an invite for individuals interested in the competition. When I saw the email for this year and saw the list of different knowledge responsibilities I went ahead and tried out.”

The Best Warrior Competition consists of several challenges over a period of four days. Competitors are expected to display proficiency in marksmanship, physical and written tests, land navigation, self-aid buddy care and combat-communications. Though not a part of her day-to-day operations, Brown trained for months prior to familiarize herself with competition requirements.

“The ruck has been the most challenging thus far,” Brown said. “I don’t think I was as prepared for the last four miles of fatigue, but it’s something you have to learn and power through on your own. The obstacle course was the most fun. It was hard at points, but the competition is about challenging yourself. Getting over the fear factor.”

Brown has more than fifteen years of combined service between the Marines and Texas Air National Guard. Even with deployments to Iraq under her belt, she still lacked all of the experience needed to be successful to compete. After qualifying at the base-level, her unit was instrumental in making sure that she would be a strong contender.

“It [training] exposed me to a different environment in the Guard,” Brown recalled. “To train, we ran tactical air control party obstacle courses, had weapons knowledge training and did 45-pound ruck marches, which was good because I got exposure. Then they had land navigation at the schoolhouse at Camp Bullis.”

The competition is meant to be grueling, with extreme stress and long testing hours. The simulations reflect real-world combat situations and test the tactical and technical skills of the members being evaluated.

Competing alongside fellow Airmen, Soldiers and state partners provides a unique opportunity to experience completely different ways of accomplishing the mission, Brown said.

“We all serve.” Brown said. “It’s a humbling experience, and being here I hope is an example that will encourage others to participate. I don’t back down from a challenge and I’m proud to have been a part of this event.” **-D**

Tech. Sgt. Jennifer Brown climbs down some ropes during an obstacle course at the Texas Military Department’s 2018 Best Warrior Competition, March 1, 2018 near Bastrop, Texas. The obstacle course was timed and tested the participant’s strength and cardiovascular system. (U.S. Air National Guard photo/Staff Sgt. Agustin Salazar)



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