GUARDLIFE

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GUARDLIFE



















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COVER: Graduates

Warrant Officers Tu Bui, left, Daniel Bui, and Alvin Bui at Fort Rucker, Ala., March 2, 2016. (U.S. Army National Guard photo by Staff Sgt. Wayne Woolley/Released)

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"WE CAN'T SAY THANK YOU ENOUGH."



Senior Airman Willie Cruz-Moya, 108th Wing, New Jersey Air National Guard, along with 108th and the 177th Fighter Wing Airmen stand at attention after receiving the Humanitarian Service Medal at an award ceremony at the National Guard Armory in Lawrenceville, N.J., May 3, 2016. For more photos and video from the ceremony, click on this photo. (U.S. Air National Guard photo by Master Sgt. Mark C. Olsen/Released)

NJNG receives Humanitarian award

By Staff Sgt. Wayne Woolley
New Jersey National Guard
Public Affairs

More than eighty New Jersey Army and Air Guard members received the Humanitarian Service Medal on May 3 for their assistance in the Hurricane Sandy rescue, recovery and re-building efforts.



Brig. Gen. Michael L. Cunniff, left, The Adjutant General of New Jersey, congratulates Humanitarian Service Medal recipient Sgt. 1st Class William E. Daisey at the National Guard Armory in Lawrenceville, N.J., May 3, 2016. For more photos and video from the ceremony, click on this photo. (U.S. Air National Guard photo by Master Sgt. Mark C. Olsen/Released)

All of the more than 2,300 Soldiers and Airmen who took part in the largest domestic mobilization in the New Jersey National Guard's history will be ultimately awarded the medal.

"You the brave men and women did not only save lives…You protected a wounded state where devastation spanned 150 miles," Lt. Gov. Kim Guadagno said at the award ceremony at the National Guard Armory in Lawrenceville. "Wherever, whatever, whenever, you did it and we saw and we can't say thank you enough."

Although Hurricane Sandy and the Guard's epic response took place more than three years ago, Pentagon approval of the award took time, and the intervention of U.S. Rep. Tom MacArthur (R-3rd Dist.) The lawmaker, whose district includes Joint Base McGuire-Dix-Lakehurst, sought Department of Defense approval for all National Guard troops who responded to the storm after he was approached by New Jersey Air Guard Master Sgt. Carl Clegg.

Clegg, a 108th Wing public affairs videographer who spent days documenting the relief efforts undertaken by the National Guard that had saved lives and helped the civil authorities with recovery efforts and deserved recognition. MacArthur said that he agreed.

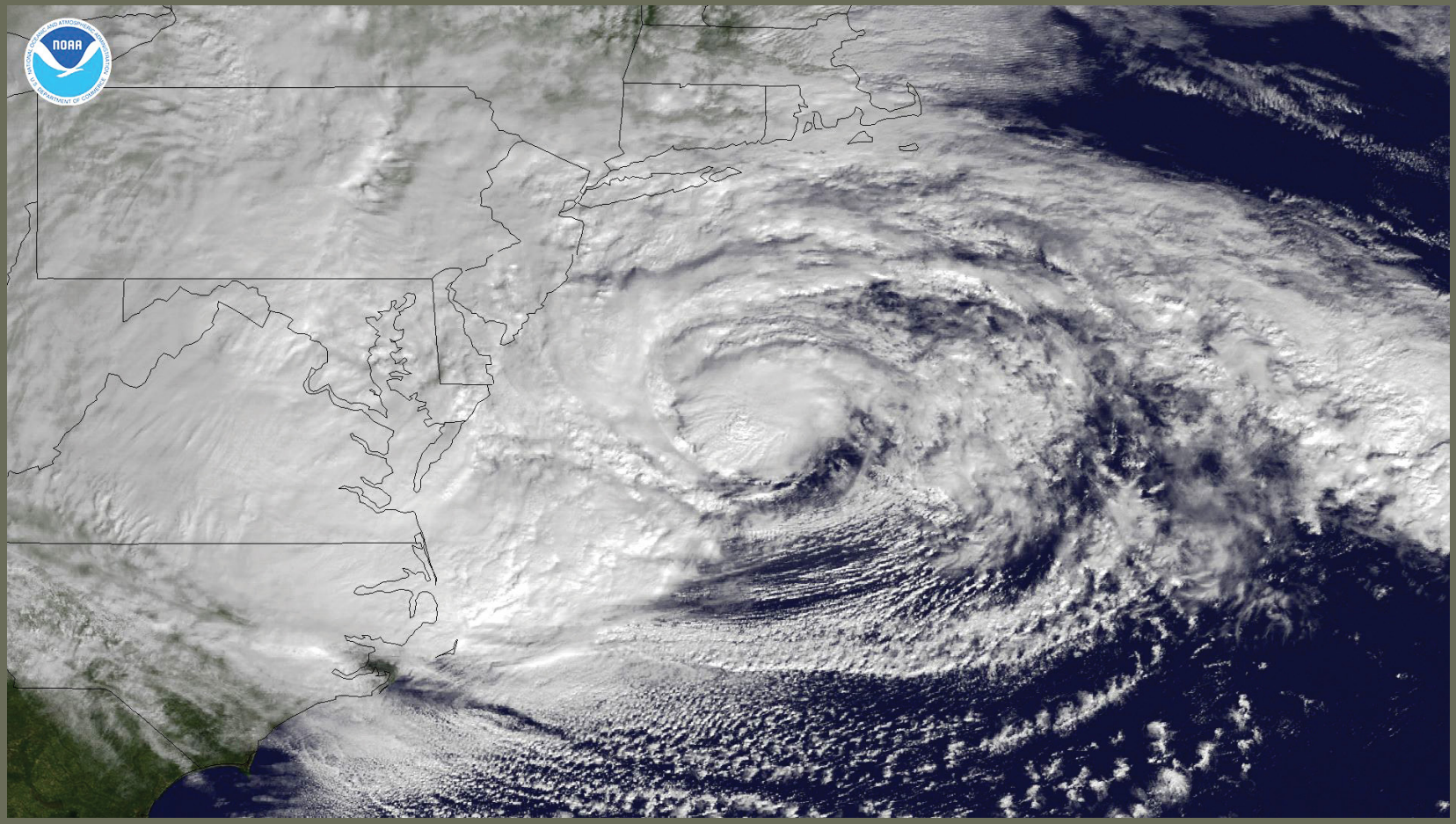
"You, the men and women of the National Guard chose to go wherever and whenever and that deserves our gratitude," he said.

One of MacArthur's staff members, Kyle Melander, began work on convincing the Department of Defense to reinterpret the criteria for the award, which is normally awarded only to military personnel on Title 10 active duty. All National Guard troops mobilized for the storm fell under Title 32 active duty, but served alongside Title 10 troops who became eligible for the award immediately.

Brig. Gen. Michael L. Cunniff assisted MacArthur in presenting the medals during the ceremony. New Jersey National Guard troops rescued more than 7,000 residents and their pets in the days after the storm made landfall. The troops remained on duty following the storm, assisting civil authorities with security, transportation, logistics, and reconstructing efforts, delivering more than 10,000 meals and hundreds of thousands of gallons of fuel.

NJNG SUPERSTORM SANDY TRIBUTE

Click image to play video



Video by Tech. Sgt. Matt Hecht

New Jersey National Guard Public Affairs

First to Fire

By Spc. Devon Bistarkey
444th Mobile Public Affairs Detachment

Soldiers are initiated into the military during basic combat training.

They are galvanized as warriors and leaders through their training with the resolve that they can be all that they can be.

Second Lieutenant Jennifer Wain believed she could a combat arms leader. And she realized her dream.

Wain, a fire direction officer with the 3-112th Field Artillery Battalion, is now the first female combat arms officer in the history of the New Jersey Army National Guard.

She is well aware that that the contributions of tens of thousands of military women who came before her made that possible.

"Women have been in combat roles for years, and now we are able to recognize it," said Wain.

For nearly two decades women have served as pilots, truck drivers and direct support personnel during war and in support of military efforts overseas.

Now, as the Department of Defense slowly begins opening nearly all of the combat specialties to women, female Soldiers are being given opportunities for even the most rigorous combat training. For example, last month, two female officers became the first women to graduate from the grueling nine-week Ranger School.



2nd Lt. Jennifer Wain,center, Staff Sgt. Bryan Young, right, and Sgt. Santiago Sanchez, all with the 3-112th Field Artillery, check the sighting system on the all-digital M119A3 105 mm lightweight howitzer during a live fire exercise at Joint Base McGuire-Dix-Lakehurst, N.J., Aug. 26, 2015. The upgraded M119A3 is equipped with a digital fire control system that includes an inertial navigation unit and guided-precision system technology. (U.S. Air National Guard photo by Master Sgt. Mark C. Olsen/Released)

"Women have been in combat roles for years, and now we are able to recognize it."

2nd Lt. Jennifer Wain
3-112th Field Artillery

In New Jersey, Wain is not the only woman making history.

Capt. Sarah Bernal, who served for 17 years as a leader in a combat service support role, now serves as the first female staff officer in a field artillery battalion.

Bernal said women helped pave their own way to combat leadership roles by performing combat support roles well.

"We haven't gotten to this point over night," said Bernal, who started her military career as an enlisted soldier knowing that there were certain things that she couldn't do.

New Soldiers won't know what it is like not to have these opportunities, said Bernal.

Giving more opportunities to women also gives commanders to build stronger units.

"This gives me a wider pool of candidates," said Lt. Col. Rob Hughes, Field Artillery battalion commander, "it's about putting the best person in the job."



177TH AT THRACIAN STAR



Two F-16 Fighting Falcons with the New Jersey Air National Guard's 177th Fighter Wing, lead a mixed formation including a Bulgarian air force MiG-29 Fulcrum and MiG-21 Fishbed over Bulgaria during Thracian Star July 20, 2015. Thracian Star 2015 is a bilateral training exercise to enhance interoperability with the Bulgarian air force. (U.S. Air National Guard photo by Master Sgt. Andrew J. Moseley/Released)



Warrant Officers Daniel Bui, Tu Bui and Alvin Bui at the Fort Rucker, Ala., airfield March 2, 2016.

Family's journey leads brothers to new heights

Story and photos by Staff Sgt. Wayne Woolley
444th Mobile Public Affairs Detachment

FORT RUCKER, Ala. -- Joseph Bui once jumped from a U.S. Army helicopter to a rooftop for an infantry assault during the Vietnam War.

As a young South Vietnamese Army soldier, he was impressed by the American technology, but far more taken by the ideals his allies from half a world away seemed to represent.

"America," he said through a translator. "Was freedom. A better life."

On March 3, Joseph Bui, 63, and his wife, Mung, 62, watched as three of their sons, Warrant Officer Alvin Bui, Warrant Officer Daniel Bui, and Warrant Officer Tu Bui, became the first brothers to graduate in the same class from the U.S. Army Initial Rotary Wing Training course and become UH-60 Black Hawk helicopter pilots.

Joseph Bui grinned beatifically as he and his wife, Mung, pinned silver aviator wings to their sons' dress uniforms during the graduation ceremony.

"Today was the day my brothers and I paid back our mother and father for all they've done for us," said Tu Bui, the youngest of a trio that often finishes each other's sentences. "We want them to know that the sacrifices they made weren't for nothing."

The brothers serve in the New Jersey Army National Guard. Alvin Bui, 29, joined first, followed by Daniel, 27, and Tu, 25. Alvin began his enlisted career as an unmanned aerial vehicle operator and maintainer. Daniel began in supply and later transitioned to become an unmanned aerial vehicle maintainer. Tu became a crew chief with New Jersey's 150th Assault Helicopter Battalion.

"I kept hearing New Jersey needed more pilots," Tu said. "We decided to go for it."

The brothers began that path together, graduating in the same Warrant Officer Career College class to earn their commissions in 2014. And then it was on to flight school.

Because of the training schedules at the Aviation Center of Excellence, Daniel began his training first, followed by Alvin and Tu. Although the brothers trained separately for much of flight school, they lived and studied together.

They compared notes about the perils of the water survival test, the stress of survival training and most importantly, the intellectual challenges of memorizing flight procedures and learning to handle a technologically-advanced aircraft.

At one point near the end of training, Chief Warrant Officer 3 David Torres, an instructor pilot, put Alvin and Tu together as "stick buddies."

"I thought it would be awesome. If my brother was there, I'd want to fly with him," Torres said. "And with brothers, you figure they'll study harder to outdo each other."

Although Daniel completed his training earlier, the decision was made to allow the brothers to graduate together.

Col. Mark Levine, Director of TRADOC Capability Manager for Lift, noted the Bui brother's graduation was a historic moment. Twenty-eight years of records showed no trio of brothers becoming Army aviators at the same time.

"What an incredible honor to have three brothers graduating on the same day," Levine said, in his address their graduating class.

After the ceremony, Daniel Bui, said it was the matter of making the most of an opportunity.



Joseph Bui pins silver aviator wings on Warrant Officer Alvin Bui as the Soldier's mother, Mung Bui, looks on during flight school graduation ceremony on March 3, 2016, at Fort Rucker, Ala.

"It's being in the right place, at the right time, and doing the right things," he said.

Doing the right thing is a bit of a theme for the Bui family.

After serving alongside American military forces in the war, Joseph Bui became determined to someday come to America. But it took years of planning, and saving.

When the war ended, Bui worked as a carpenter, got married and began a family.

In 1994, he was able to arrange for a relative living in Reading, Pa. to sponsor the family. By then, eight of the Bui's nine children had already been born. After living in Pennsylvania for several years, the family moved to Toms River, N.J. in 2003.

The family's older daughters helped Mung Bui open a nail salon and the older brothers went to work doing construction with their father.

By then, Alvin was 16. Daniel and Tu got up with him at 4 every morning do a paper route before walking to school.

"We just took care of each other," Tu said. "We knew how hard our Mom, Dad and older siblings were working. We just had that self-sufficient mindset. Look toward a goal. Work hard and get there."

The Bui brothers are eager to get back to New Jersey and begin on-the-job training. Because they are all junior pilots, it will take some time before they share the same cockpit.

Each has a goal as an aviator. Alvin hopes to land a civilian job as a pilot to compliment his Army National Guard career. Daniel wants to focus on improving his flight skills with the aim of becoming a pilot in command, the aircraft commander. Tu is aiming even higher. He's already started to check out the NASA program that turns Soldiers into astronauts.

"Go big or go home, right?" he said with a laugh.

The brothers have two other goals.

The first is helping their baby sister, Linh, 19, join the Army National Guard and become an aviator.

The second?

Become an example for the next generation of the Bui family, like their parents before them.

"We're the zero generation … what we're doing sets the bar," Alvin said. "What we're doing lets the kids that will come in the future see what we did coming from Vietnam and realize they can do what we did – or more."

JERSEY TAKES REGION 1 BEST WARRIOR

By Staff Sgt. Wayne Woolley
New Jersey National Guard Public Affairs



Spc. Shaquille Phillips-Breedlove, right, paces Spc. Joseph Garback during the 12-mile road march part of the National Guard Region 1 Best Warrior Competition held at Connecticut's Camp Niantic Army National Guard Training Center May 4, 2016. Garback was chosen as the National Guard 2016 Region I Soldier of the Year. (U.S. Army National Guard photo by Staff Sgt. Jerry Boffen/Released)

Ask New Jersey Army National Guard Spc. Joseph Garback what he likes best about being a Soldier and he answers without hesitation.

"I just love getting dirty," Garback said.

The 22-year-old field artilleryman had plenty of opportunities for that last week at the National Guard Region 1 Best Warrior Competition, as torrential rains turned Connecticut's Camp Niantic Army National Guard Training Center into a giant mud puddle.

That apparently put Garback in his comfort zone because he won the competition and secured a chance to represent New Jersey next month at the National Guard-wide Best Warrior competition in Massachusetts. It was New Jersey's first win at a regional Best Warrior competition in recent memory.

The three-day event is designed to test Soldier skills in a way that pushes competitors to their physical and mental limits. The physical portion includes a PT test, a stress shooting event, an urban assault course, and a 12-mile road march. The cerebral part of the event includes day and night land navigation, a board before command sergeant majors, and a role playing exercise where competitors were evaluated on their ability to help a fellow Soldier contemplating suicide.

Even though Garback usually works out twice a day, he conceded the road march over hilly terrain was a challenge. He got his motivation to keep pushing from Spc. Shaquille Phillips-Breedlove, a fellow trooper from Alpha Company of the 3-112th Field Artillery.

"He was shoving bananas and Cliff Bars at me the whole time," Garback said with a laugh.

Garback, who grew up in Sewell and graduated from Washington Township High School, didn't take much time to celebrate after the competition. He returned to New Jersey just in time for final exams at Rutgers University, where he's majoring in criminal justice and Spanish.

His plan over the next few weeks is to keep up with his normal training regimen, which includes training in the martial art of Muay Thai, as well as some long walks with his ruck sack in preparation for the next phase of Best Warrior.

He's not putting too much pressure on himself for the next stage either.

"I just want to have fun with it," he said. "You can't take yourself too seriously. Usually, when you're doing what you like and having fun, good things happen."

TIGHT CLEARANCE



Soldiers with the 404th Civil Affairs Battalion (Airborne), United States Army Reserve, sling load cargo onto a Black Hawk with the 1-150th Assault Helicopter Battalion, New Jersey Army National Guard, during joint training at Coyle Drop Zone, Joint Base McGuire-Dix-Lakehurst, N.J., Feb. 29, 2016. For more photos, click on this image to go to a photo album. (U.S. Air National Guard photo by Master Sgt. Mark C. Olsen/Released)

JOINT SLING LOAD TRAINING

Click image to play video



Video by Tech. Sgt. Matt Hecht
New Jersey National Guard Public Affairs

STAND DOWN



Above: Staff Sgt. Debbie Macalalad, 108th Medical Group, New Jersey Air National Guard, performs a blood pressure check on a homeless veteran at the New Jersey Department of Military and Veterans Affairs Stand Down at the John F. Kennedy Recreation Center in Newark, N.J., Oct. 10, 2015. Stand down is a military term referring to exhausted combat units that were removed from the battlefront to a place of security and safety for rest and recovery. Today, stand downs are grass roots, community-based intervention programs to help veterans battle life on the streets. (U.S. Air National Guard photo by Master Sgt. Carl Clegg, Released)

PAPAL SECURITY



New Jersey National Guard Soldiers and Airmen provide security as pedestrians cross the Benjamin Franklin Bridge from Camden, N.J., to Philadelphia for the Mass led by Pope Francis Sept. 27, 2015. The joint New Jersey National Guard task force of Soldiers with the 1st Squadron, 102nd Cavalry, and Airmen from the 108th Wing, assisted New Jersey civil authorities and the Delaware Port Authority with security during Pope Francis's visit to Philadelphia Sept. 26-27. For more photos, click on this photo to see an album of images. (U.S. Air National Guard photo by Master Sgt. Mark C. Olsen/Released)

OPERATION EAGLE EYE



Right: Senior Airman Josh Derins, a tactical air control party Airman with the 227th Air Support Operations Squadron, secures an observation post during Exercise Eagle Eye, at Warren Grove Gunnery Range, N.J., Feb. 18, 2016. Photos left to right: An Army AH-64D Apache from the Pennsylvania Army National Guard's 1-104th Attack Reconnaissance Battalion flies over Warren Grove Gunnery Range providing close air support to Airmen from the 227th Air Support Operation Squadron and Soldiers from A Company, 2nd Battalion, 19th Special Forces Group. A Soldier from the 19th Special Forces Group, left, advises Senior Airman Bernabé Agüero with the 227th Air Support Operations Squadron on fields of fire. Soldiers from the 19th Special Forces Group and Airmen from the 227th Air Support Operations Squadron carry a simulated casualty to a UH-60 Black Hawk with the New Jersey Army National Guard's 1-150th Assault Helicopter Battalion. For more photos, click on any of these photos to see an album of images. (U.S. Air National Guard photos by Tech. Sgt. Matt Hecht/ Released)







LEADERSHIP BY SHOWING THE WAY

Story and photo by Staff Sgt. Wayne Woolley
New Jersey National Guard Public Affairs

When 1st Sgt. Dharam Manka found out his unit leadership had nominated him to compete for the CSM (Command Sergeant Major) Wilfred Z. Lea Outstanding First Sergeant Award, he was honored, but afraid the spotlight was shining in the wrong place.

"The way I try to lead, it's not about me, it's about the Soldier," Manka said recently. "I'm not about awards."

I just do everything I can and make sure my people know I will never ask them to do something I haven't done myself.

The spotlight found Manka anyway, and he took home the award from the Enlisted Association of the National Guard of New Jersey for 2015.

Manka, the 1st Sergeant of the 50th Financial Management Support Unit detachment in Flemington said he tries to instill in his Soldiers the importance of attention to detail. In finance, details matter and can mean the difference between Soldiers being paid on time or properly reimbursed. Not surprising, considering that Manka began his military career in a different detail-oriented job, as an active duty Marine working as an aviation mechanic.



Manka, 36, joined the National Guard after serving on active duty with the Marine Corps. In addition to his duties with the 50th FMSU, Manka works full-time in the personnel section at Joint Force Headquarters. With bachelors and masters' degrees from Rutgers in business, Manka is a logical fit for personnel.

He earned both degrees while in the Guard through the tuition-waiver program. He strongly encourages other Soldiers to use their National Guard education benefits.

"There's no reason someone shouldn't be able to get a degree during an enlistment," Manka said. "Everyone should be taking advantage of this."

While Manka says he wasn't looking for the recognition, he was glad to accept the honor because it reflects well on his unit, and his Soldiers.

"I just do everything I can and make sure my people know I will never ask them to do something I haven't done myself," he said. "People will follow you if you show you're technically and tactically proficient."



THANK YOU!



Senior Airman Dana Rhoads, right, 177th Fighter Wing, shakes hands with a resident at the New Jersey Veterans Memorial Home at Vineland during the 15th Annual Holiday "Songfest" at the Home at Vineland, N.J., Dec. 16, 2015. Sixteen 177th Airmen joined forces with more than 80 fourth graders from the Seaview School in Linwood, N.J., and brought their singing talents to the Home's residents during the annual event. For more photos, click on this photo to see an album of images. (U.S. Air National Guard photo by Master Sgt. Mark C. Olsen/Released)



TOUGH GUYS EAT THEIR BROCCOLI

Story by Tech. Sgt. Matt Hecht and Airman 1st Class Julia Pyun
108th Wing Public Affairs

Photos by Tech. Sgt. Matt Hecht, 108th Wing Public Affairs

By day, Staff Sgt. Leon Jackson wrestles the heavy metal exoskeleton of aircraft. By night, the 108th Wing Airman tosses grown men to the ground and twists their bodies till they give up the fight.

A single-minded determination led Jackson to the gold medal at the International Brazilian Jiu-Jitsu Federation 2015 World Jiu-Jitsu No Gi competition in Long Beach, Calif. on Nov. 7 after only three years of competing in the sport.

The first key to his unlikely success?

“My mother raised me right,” said Jackson, 25. “She raised me to be tough.”

The second?

Vegetables. Lots and lots of vegetables.

“I’m a no-meat athlete,” Jackson said. “A lot of people ask how someone so big can get by on a vegan diet, but I’m used to it.”

Jackson switched to the vegan diet when he earnestly began Jiu-Jitsu training after one of his Middle East deployments with the Air National Guard.

At first, he marveled at the diet’s ability to boost his cardiovascular endurance and reduce inflammation – huge benefits in a martial art where the objective is to throw an opponent to the ground and lock them into a submission hold.

Then Jackson began to embrace veganism as a lifestyle, even creating a website to unite other no-meat Jiu-Jitsu athletes.

“I feel better knowing that my dietary choice reduces my carbon footprint and saves the lives of animals,” Jackson said.

Jackson visits the Joint Base McGuire-Dix-Lakehurst gym every morning at 5 a.m. for his first workout of the day. After his workday as a full-time aircraft structural maintenance mechanic, he hits the gym again before heading to his neighborhood Jiu-Jitsu academy.

There, he trains Ultimate Fighting Championship fighters like Frankie Edgar, Edson Barboza, Corey Anderson as well as World Series of Fighting Feather Weight Champion, Marlon Moraes. It might be the quality of training partners that has helped the six-foot-one, 215 pound Jackson win more than 20 tournaments in addition to the one in San Francisco.

In addition to his personal training, he also trains young people.

“We teach the kids about perseverance and having a non-quitting spirit,” said Jackson. “You learn a ton about yourself through Jiu-Jitsu. There will be times when you get frustrated with your technique or you lose a major tournament. Sometimes you doubt yourself and want to give up, but if you stick with it, you learn to fight your way out of certain situations. If you’re stuck in a submission (hold), you have to learn how to escape or else your arms are going to break or you’ll be choked unconscious. You can apply this mentality to your life and in everyday situations.”



Jackson applies this to his demanding job with the Air Guard, where mistakes can compromise the safety of air crews.

Jackson’s supervisor, Master Sgt. Russell Howarth, calls Jackson an asset to the team.

“Leon is ambitious and not afraid to try new tasks. He’s always volunteering and willing to learn,” said Howarth. “He’s a full-timer, so I can always rely on him when I’m in a pinch. He’s open-minded and a great asset to everyone. I hope he continues to have the same mindset and attitude, and I can definitely see him moving up in the world.”

For now, Jackson is motivated by the prospect of more world championships.

“Every day when I wake up, I think about this quote, ‘Hard work beats talent, when talent doesn’t work hard,’” he said.

Someday, though, he wants to own his own academy to share the joy of what he calls “the gentle art.”

“Not only is Jiu-Jitsu very addicting, but it’s also very therapeutic,” he said. “We all have something that we turn to when we need to clear our minds. Jiu-Jitsu is the tool I use to escape and free my mind.”

For more photos, click on either image to see an album of photos.



AFRICOM VISITS AASF

Staff Sgt. Simon Debran, left, UH-60A Black Hawk crew chief, 1-150th Assault Helicopter Battalion, briefs visiting African air force members touring the New Jersey Army National Guard's Army Aviation Support Facility during an AFRICOM conference at Joint Base McGuire-Dix-Lakehurst, N.J., August 31, 2015. The African Partnership Flight visit to the Facility is part of a U.S. Air Forces in Europe and U.S. Air Forces Africa program, which includes military representatives from Angola, Burkina Faso, Ghana, Mali, Niger, Nigeria, Senegal and Tunisia that emphasized increased maintenance and logistics knowledge and procedures. The program was created to conduct regional military to military events with African air forces to build aviation capacity, enhance regional cooperation and increase interoperability. For more photos, click on this photo to see an album of images. (U.S. Air National Guard photo by Master Sgt. Mark C. Olsen/Released)

VIRTUAL REALITY ACTIVE SHOOTER



Security Forces Airmen from the New Jersey Air National Guard's 108th Wing respond to a simulated active shooter while assisted by a U.S. Marshal instructor in a VirTra firearms training simulator at a U.S. Marshal training site in Lawrenceville, N.J., Dec. 12, 2015. The Airmen practiced high-risk traffic stop and active shooter scenarios. (U.S. Air National Guard photo by Tech. Sgt. Matt Hecht/Released)

MAKING HISTORY

Story and photo by Master Sgt. Mark C. Olsen, 108th Wing Public Affairs



"My vision is I want to make sure the enlisted have every opportunity to progress in their careers and to make sure that they are well informed of what's going on, any issues and any opportunities. I want to make sure they are happy."

This year, and appropriately enough during Women's History Month, a woman was chosen to serve as the state command chief master sergeant – the highest ranking enlisted position in the New Jersey Air National Guard.

"Anybody can do it," said State Command Chief Master Sgt. Janeen M. Fillari. "It takes time; you have to start early in your career; putting the hard work in."

Fillari, a former member of the 108th Wing, succeeds State Command Chief Master Sgt. Vincent Morton, also a former 108th member. She is also the first woman to serve as New Jersey's state command chief.

"My vision is I want to make sure the enlisted have every opportunity to progress in their careers and to make sure that they are well informed of what's going on, any issues and any opportunities. I want to make sure they are happy."

That means going out and meeting people.

"I'm going to be getting out to the units, I don't want to do this job from in here [she gestures around her office]; I want to be out and about," said Fillari. "I expect to be start visiting the units as soon as possible, to make sure people know who I am."

"I want to hear what people have to say. I want the E-1s, 2s, 3s, 4s and 5s to know that we work for them."

For Fillari, the key to all this are the chief master sergeants at the 108th Wing and 177th Fighter Wing.

"We all have to work together," said Fillari. "I don't want to solve all the problems; they have to solve the problems. I want them to critically think about what the issues are and be proactive."

For Fillari, everyone is involved in the process from identifying problems to finding solutions.

"What I would like to start doing is have town hall meetings. I want to know if there is something broken; then get ideas, suggestions; if we can do things differently, smarter."

Fillari pinpointed one aspect of her life that prepared her for each successive role she has served during her military career – education.

Her education credentials underscores that point: a paralegal certificate from St. Mary's College of California; an associates in Applied Science Paralegal Studies, Camden County College, N.J.; another associates in Paralegal Studies from the Community College of the Air Force, a Bachelor of Science in Human Services in Legal Studies from Thomas Edison State College, N.J. and a Master of Arts in Liberal Studies also from Thomas Edison State College.

Fillari joined the Air Force in July 1989 as a services specialist and cross-trained into the paralegal career field in 1994, where she stayed until November 1998 when she transferred to the Reserves where she served as paralegal from 1998 to 2005.

In 2005, Fillari joined the 108th Wing, New Jersey Air National Guard as the law office superintendent. And there it might have ended and Fillari would not have been standing in the state command chief's office had it not been for one person.

Fillari credits retired Chief Master Sgt. Maryalice Rebis with where she is today.

"She had always been a role model, a mentor; I used her as an example of this is what I am supposed to do, this is how I am supposed to act."

At Rebis' urging, Fillari applied as the Air National Guard Paralegal Liaison, Northeast Region.

"Had it not been for her, I probably would have retired from the 108th and not gotten involved at the national level."

Instead she applied and was chosen as the Air Combat Command senior paralegal manager for the Air National Guard.

"I'm a critical thinker. You have to be in this job. I like to find out what the issues are; make sure I have all the correct information. And then I like to solve the issues."

As the senior paralegal manager, Fillari assisted the ANG paralegal career field functional manager in providing guidance to Guard paralegals located at ACC wing legal offices.

"I worked a lot with senior leadership, talking out issues with them, addressing concerns."

It turned out to be the perfect training ground for the state command chief position.

"It was a crash course for this job," said Fillari.

This new duty is a big change from her previous position where she worked strictly with paralegals.

"There's not many of us out there that do this job, so I have deep respect for people that come in, put the uniform on and do what they have to do, work the long hours, put forth their best effort. I want to make sure we're rewarding our people and that we're taking care of any issues that are coming up."

"My motto is 'Your life is a resume.' You can choose if you want it to be half a page or if you want two pages filled. The key is never look back and wish you could have done something. Do it."











Airmen take on the heat

Above right: Airmen from the Connecticut, Maine, New Jersey, Rhode Island and Vermont Air National Guard Fire Departments perform a live aircraft fire training exercise at 165th Airlift Wing's Regional Fire Training Facility at Savannah, Ga., April 4, 2016. Left top to bottom: Airman 1st Class Brooke Hunt, 177th Fighter Wing Fire Department, New Jersey Air National Guard, utilizes a halligan tool to soften a vehicle during basic vehicle extrication training exercises April 6, 2016. Senior Airman Rick Bellwoar, 177th Fire Department, operates a hose during P-26 Tanker training exercises. Airmen 1st Class Trey Gates, left, and Kenneth Brown, both with the 177th Fighter Wing Fire Department, lower a ladder during a ladder operation training exercise April 12, 2016. Airman 1st Class Kenneth Brown of the 177th Fighter Wing Fire Department, New Jersey Air National Guard, prepares to navigate through a confined space during a confined space training exercise with simulated black-out conditions at the 165th Airlift Wing's Regional Fire Training Facility April 12, 2016. For more photos, click on any of these photos to see an album of images. (U.S. Air National Guard photos by Tech. Sgt. Andrew J. Merlock/Released)

Door Gunners





Above: Staff Sgt. Paul Cimino, right, a master gunner with the 1-150th Assault Helicopter Battalion, New Jersey Army National Guard, observes Sgt. William Harpe, a UH-60 Black Hawk helicopter crew chief as he fires on targets with an M240B machine gun during an aerial gunnery training mission at the 177th Fighter Wing's Detachment 1, Warren Grove Gunnery Range, N.J., April 15, 2016. Bottom, left to right: Sgt. William Harpe, center, preps 7.62 ammunition at the Army Aviation Support Facility on Joint Base McGuire-Dix-Lakehurst, N.J. UH-60 Black Hawk helicopter crew members reload canisters with 7.62 mm ammunition between passes over the targets. For more photos, click on any of these photos to see an album of images. (U.S. Air National Guard photos by Master Sgt. Mark C. Olsen/Released)



Downpour

Maintainers with 177th Fighter Wing, New Jersey Air National Guard, run for cover during a rain storm at Naval Air Station Key West, Fla., April 21, 2016. The 177th is in Florida for training. (U.S. Air National Guard photo by Staff Sgt. Andrew DeMartini/Released)