



Allen L. Shaw

U.S. Army Garrison Fort Wainwright

Mr. Allen Shaw is a member of the Fort Wainwright, Alaska Public Affairs team. He began as the editor of the Alaska Post newspaper and is a writer, photographer, media liaison and jack-of-all-trades. The Alaska Post is an eight-page weekly that provides news and information about the Arctic Warriors to the Fairbanks community. Mr. Shaw holds true to a belief shared by the soccer superstar Mia Hamm: *I am the member of a team, and I rely on them. I defer to it and sacrifice for it, because the team, not the individual is the ultimate champion.*

Mr. Shaw worked for the Fairbanks North Star Borough for thirty-years and seven months, serving as the Pioneer Park Supervisor since August 1987. He was also a member of several committees and has been involved in numerous organizations while employed at the Borough. He is able to bridge both sides of the gate.

Allen Lee Shaw was born on Fort Richardson, Alaska in 1955, graduated from Satellite High School in 1973, joined the Army, attended the Defense Information School in 1974 and was stationed at Fort Wainwright as a Public Information Specialist. While assigned to the Public Information Office, Mr. Shaw was a reporter, weekly columnist and assistant editor for the Yukon Sentinel.

After a distinguished career in the parks and recreation field, where he supervised nearly 1,000 people during his tenure and help coordinate hundreds of events on the local, state and national level, Mr. Shaw seized an opportunity to revisit his newspaper roots. After thirty-five years, Allen returned to the staff of Fort Wainwright Public Affairs and has diversified to support all aspects of command information and community programs.

Mr. Shaw received National Recreation and Parks Association certification in Parks and Recreation Maintenance Management from Oregon State University and Business Management from the University of Alaska, Fairbanks.

Mr. Shaw currently divides his volunteer efforts among the downtown community recreation committee, the Alaska Barbecue Association board and the 2014 Alaska Arctic Winter Games host committee.



REPLY TO
ATTENTION OF:

DEPARTMENT OF THE ARMY
INSTALLATION MANAGEMENT COMMAND
HEADQUARTERS, U.S. ARMY GARRISON, FORT WAINWRIGHT
1060 GAFFNEY ROAD #6000
FORT WAINWRIGHT, ALASKA 99703-6000

IMFW-PA

12 Feb 14

MEMORANDUM FOR IMCOM-Pacific Region Public Affairs Office, 132 Yamanaga Street, Fort Shafter, Hawaii, 96858-5520

SUBJECT: Nomination for Allen Shaw as Moss-Holland Civilian Journalist of the Year.

1. As the chief writer for Fort Wainwright's newspaper, the Alaska Post, Allen Shaw's work is above reproach. His contributions as a photojournalist are enhanced by his abilities to edit copy, take photographs and layout newspapers.
2. Mr. Shaw is a self-starter, aggressively pursuing stories on his own initiative. He has developed a network of contacts who keep him informed of events and activities that do not necessarily come to the attention of the PAO. He looks for unusual and offbeat topics in an attempt to capture the attention and interest of his audience, and he covers installation events with enthusiasm and first-hand knowledge.
3. As a former Soldier who returned to the Army as a Civilian employee after an illustrious career in parks and recreation, Mr. Shaw has an understanding of the importance of command information to Soldiers. Mr. Shaw's stories ensure our Soldiers are informed and entertained. He is active in the local Fairbanks community and often shares news of events and opportunities to get involved in the community through his contributions to the newspaper.
4. Mr. Shaw holds himself to a high moral standard. His character and his conduct are beyond reproach; his conduct, ethics and his work exceed the highest standards. With whole-hearted enthusiasm, Allen Shaw is my nominee for Civilian Journalist of the Year.

CONNIE Y. STORCH
Deputy Public Affairs Officer

APPROVED / DISAPPROVED

WESLEY D. POTTER
Deputy to the Garrison Commander

Overcoming the stigma of depression, achieving emotional resilience

Allen Shaw,
Fort Wainwright PAO

The unexpected pressure of everyday life is often challenging and at times becomes overwhelming. Resiliency is the mental, physical, emotional and behavioral ability to face and cope with adversity, adapt to change, recover, learn and grow from setbacks. Although there are many tools available to assist Soldiers, Family members and civilian employees with an occasional attitude adjustment, they are often afraid, ashamed or just unaware of who to talk to or how to access assistance.

October is National Depression Awareness Month, with the theme "The courage to seek help."

Chaplain (Maj.) Dwight Broedel, supervisor, Family Life Counseling Center on Fort Wainwright, compared negotiating through times of depression to teaching or learning map-reading. He said, "Depression is a low point surrounded on all sides by high ground. Simply put, depressions are low spots along the path of life which are great places for [mental] ambushes. Folks can easily get bogged down in the goo that tends to collect there and occasionally have difficulty getting out on their own." Without reaching for a helping hand or a life-line, a person can get stuck or even buried in the quagmire of desolation. The thought of being at the bottom, realizing there is the hope of someday ascending out of the dismal low place up to a place of joyful delight, but not being able to do it alone can cause one to slip deeper in despair. "Fam-

ily Life Chaplains are trail guides or pathfinders through the swampy times of life," Broedel said. "Since we must all travel through wild-places and deep valleys of sorrow [to complete our mission], wouldn't you rather go through it with someone who knows the way across?"

The Army is calling on commanders and leaders to inform Soldiers, Family members and civilian personnel that depression is treatable and help decrease the stigma associated with seeking treatment.

"Our emotional health needs care just as our physical health does," said Col. Dennis LeMaster, commander, Medical Department Activity-Alaska. "Neglecting either aspect of wellness detracts from overall health. Life is hard and there is no shame in reaching out for help. We are staffed to provide that care and MEDDAC-AK stands ready to meet the behavioral health needs of our community."

There are several aspects to the stigma that Soldiers face. The first is a personal or internal perception that most service members feel. When they seek out help and admit there is a problem, they feel that they are seen as weak or inadequate in some way.

Capt. Lois Colwell, acting chief of Behavioral Health, MEDDAC-AK, said, "The stigma generally comes from the command and varies greatly from one unit to the other. Those with commands that are not supportive generally have more problems asking for help."

For Soldiers who are hesitant to contact Behavioral Health there are other first steps they can



Overcoming the stigma of depression is often a team effort. October is National Depression Awareness Month, with the theme "The courage to seek help." Chaplain (Maj.) Dwight Broedel said, "Folks can easily get bogged down in the goo that tends to collect there and occasionally have difficulty getting out on their own." Without reaching for a helping hand or a life-line, a person can get stuck or even buried in the quagmire of desolation." (File photo)

take, such as their chaplain, unit ministry team, their battle buddy or MFLCs.

"We continue to try to diminish the stereotype of mental health issues by providing Healing the Whole Person Seminars monthly," said Chaplain (Capt.) Father John Brocato. "They focus on wounds that exist in the individual heart, whether real or perceived. As we all know, throughout our lives we pick up hurts that can fundamentally change our disposition as we relate to others." He said several battalion and company commanders have attended the seminars allowing them to see the "big picture of why we do what we do." Along with the academic book that attendees are given an opportunity to "pray through some of the pain that holds an individual in chains."

Society as a whole, including the military,

has been trying to raise awareness regarding depression and encourage Soldiers and other people to seek help. This begins by reducing the stigma associated with depression, so people will feel more comfortable about seeking help.

There are several aspects to the stigma that Soldiers face. The first is a personal or internal perception that most service members feel. When they seek out help and admit there is a problem, they feel that they are seen as weak or inadequate in some way. Colwell said everyone should be aware of these signs by, "Watching those around us for either a major increase or decrease in the amount of sleep, loss of interest in activities that once gave them pleasure, changes in appetite, increased irritability and hopelessness."

In addition to the Family Life Center and chap-

lains, Fort Wainwright has "Outpatient care for active duty on a one-on-one basis," said Brandy Ostanik, public affairs specialist, MEDDAC-AK. "Most commonly seen stress is related to work, home, family and Post Traumatic Stress Disorder."

Colwell said, "In addition to on-site counseling we have video-teleconference capabilities with psychologists out of Tripler Medical Center. This increases access to care, and some like this option because it is more comfortable for them. We also have a traumatic brain injury clinic to offer evaluations and neuropsychological testing, and a family advocacy program."

They will also see Family members for individual counseling and couples for marital counseling, she said. "Commands can also request Behavioral Health staff to come to their unit to

discuss various topics. Seasonal Affective Disorder and sleep hygiene are the most requested topics, with difficulty sleeping being the number one complaint of Soldiers."

The programs for the overall stress-management goal toward achieving resiliency through those experiencing difficult periods in life is to increase the number of clients who maintain healthy stress levels. Health and spiritual professionals agree that when people have a stress response, it causes things that happen in their bodies.

"Most folks don't need drugs or alcohol to find their way. That would be like knowing you are lost and deciding to run in circles screaming. Turning to liquor as a way to escape is surest way to stay lost," Broedel said.

Broedel said there are many other ways to reduce stress and battle depression. "No Soldier walks alone unless they have chosen to exclude others. Soldiering is a team effort." Depression is something that affects more than two-in-ten people in their lifetime and pride, ego, shame, arrogance or fear is the hurdle that must be cleared by "oneself" on the road to conquering depression. "Over, under, around or just straight through it, [is how we roll] real Soldiers don't get defeated by obstacles, we call up the combat engineers who create lanes-of-passage," Broedel said, "So ask yourself, who is the combat engineer for spiritual-emotional obstacles?"

For more information call the Family Life Center at 353-6112 or contact Behavioral Health at 361-6059.

Veterans Day: A day to remember those who served proudly

Allen Shaw,
Fort Wainwright PAO

In many parts of the world Veterans Day is known as Armistice Day or Remembrance Day, marking the end of World War I.

President Woodrow Wilson first proclaimed Armistice Day Nov. 11, 1919. He said, "To us in America the reflection of Armistice Day will be filled with solemn pride in heroism of those who died in the country's service and with gratitude for the victory, both because of the thing from which it has faced us and because of the opportunity it has given America to show her sympathy with peace and justice in the councils of nations."

Over the next 35 years the United States Congress passed a resolution requesting a proclamation to observe the holiday and eventually designated it a day to celebrate all veterans for their service by actually changing the name to Veterans Day.

Although it should not be confused with Memorial Day, which specifically honors those who died in active military service, it is a special day of remembrance for veterans and often it's an occasion spent recalling or paying tribute to a Soldier, Airman, Marine, Sailor or Coast Guardsman who was or still are military to the core.

It could be a relative, friend, battle buddy or hometown hero; it's just a special day to remember those who proudly served to protect and defend the nation.

Veterans Day is Monday. It's a day to reflect and say thank you for your service. Here are a few of the stories shared by veterans about veterans:

Tony Richey, government purchase card coordinator, Regional Contracting Office Alaska and Soldier from 1989 to 2010, remembered Sgt. 1st Class Michael Heilbrun.

"Michael or HB as I called him, was stationed here from 1999 to 2001," Richey said. "He was a part of 1-17th Infantry Battalion. He had served as a 92Y (supply spe-

cialist), and was in the Gulf War. He left Alaska and went to the noncommissioned officers school to be an instructor and spent his remaining few years there before he retired. A year or so after he retired, he had finally gotten married and was then diagnosed with prostate cancer. Even though he fought a long battle with it, he finally lost and passed away July 31, 2012."

I personally remember many proud veterans who celebrated their service and anyone who served, on a daily basis. Guys like my dad who was a young Soldier in the 101st Airborne Glider Division who "landed" in Normandy. Frank Shaw was a lifer who went from the Army Air Corps to the Air Force. Dad was a Korean War and Vietnam War veteran. He was a military man.

Then there was my father-in-law Del, a Coast Guard and Vietnam veteran who never missed an opportunity to celebrate his service, patriotism and his country. I purchased him a baseball cap that displayed the fact that he was a veteran and had it hand-beaded red, white and blue by an Alaska Native artist and adorned with a couple bear claws. He rarely took it off and loved it when someone asked him about it.

Dan Gilson, garrison antiterrorism officer and member of the Military Police Corps from 1982 to 2003, appreciated the opportunity to share a story about his favorite veteran.

"My dad, Ralph I. Gilson, was my hero," he said. "My dad was a member of the New Hampshire National Guard from January 1951 through September 1951, when he was honorably discharged so that he could enlist in the U.S. Navy. He was honorably discharged from the Navy in September 1955 and he continued his service by enlisting in the U.S. Air Force where he served from April 1957 through April 1961, when he was honorably discharged again. Finally, he enlisted with the Vermont National Guard where he served from December 1977 through December 1978 when he

received his final honorable discharge."

Gilson said his dad considered himself a Sailor and spoke fondly of his service in the Navy. "My Dad was a life member of the Veterans of Foreign Wars and the American Legion. I cherish the fact that my dad and I both hold [held] life memberships in the VFW and we are [were] brothers in the fraternity of service and am proud to say that we are [were] both veterans." Gilson said he and his father exchanged cards and phone calls every Veterans Day. "I was very proud of my dad's service to our country and he was clearly proud of my service as well."

Gilson's father passed away Dec. 7 last year. "The colors fly at half-staff every year on Dec. 7 to commemorate the bombing of Pearl Harbor but for me, there will be a much deeper meaning of the flag being at half-staff," he said. "This upcoming Veterans Day will be the first that I will experience since my father passed away. I will not be able to exchange cards or telephone calls with him but I know that he is proud of my service and I will still let him know that I am proud of his and that I love him."

We could easily fill an eight-page newspaper with stories about great Americans who served proudly over the years and probably should someday. The stories shared are only a couple that are being remembered this Veterans Day.

The United States Department of Veterans Affairs estimates that more than 131,000 veterans are homeless on any given night and nearly twice that many experience homelessness over the course of the year. It is said that conservatively, one out of every three homeless men sleeping in a doorway, alley or box in our cities and rural communities has put on a uniform and served this country.

Each of them has a story and someone, somewhere at sometime cared about them. Remember that on Veterans Day. They selflessly served.



On Veterans Day, Tony Richey, government purchasing card coordinator, Regional Contracting Office Alaska will be remembering the many brother-in-arms he served with, especially Sgt. 1st Class Michael Heilbrun, (second from the right with his eyes closed). The two Soldiers served together as part of the 1-17th Infantry Battalion from 1999 to 2001. Heilbrun passed away last year after battling prostate cancer. (Courtesy photo)



This baseball cap was purchased to display the fact that it was owned by a veteran who celebrated his service, patriotism and country. It was hand-beaded red, white and blue by an Alaska Native artist and adorned with bear claws. (Courtesy photo)



"I was very proud of my dad's service to our country and he was clearly proud of my service as well," said Dan Gilson (left), garrison antiterrorism officer and member of the Military Police Corps from 1982 to 2003. Ralph, a multi-service veteran passed away Dec. 7 last year. "The colors fly at half-staff every year on Dec. 7 to commemorate the bombing of Pearl Harbor but for me, there will be a much deeper meaning of the flag being at half-staff," Gilson said. (Courtesy photo)

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Home of the Arctic Warriors

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RECYCLED
Recycled material
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Joint information center serves the community

Allen Shaw,
Fort Wainwright PAO

The room buzzed with chatter and telephones ringing in the background. The walls were adorned with maps. On one side there was a line of tables, computers and people, on the other side, white boards covered with hand-written information in red, blue, black and green. Ten people were on the phone at the same time providing the latest information to concerned citizens on the other end of the line. "Fire information, this is Marc," echoed across the room, immediately followed by more ringing and, "Fire information, this is Sam."

During the Stuart Creek 2 Fire in the Army's Yukon Training Area, a joint information center was activated at the Bureau of Land Management building on Fort Wainwright as part of the Alaska Interagency Coordination Center Interagency Fire Information Center Communications Outreach Plan.

"The AICC activates the joint information center, or Fire Information Center, during high fire season or in anticipation of extreme fire-growth potential," said Mel Slater, Public Affairs Office, Alaska Fire Service

"Once activated, the JIC becomes the central hub for fire information in Alaska, providing support to the public information officers assigned to incidents or agency units by researching, coordinating and disseminating wild-land fire information to the public and media."

The JIC was activated July 2 as the fire began to grow. It was one of the 280 fires burning in Alaska at the time and overnight it became the largest in the state, growing from 10,000 acres to more than 45,000 acres in a matter of hours. The JIC remained open from 7 a.m. to 10 p.m. for the first three days, but quickly turned into a 24-hour operation as the fire moved north, blanketing the area with smoke and ash.

"The Alaska JIC is populated with PIOs primarily from Alaska but others from the Lower 48 may be assigned as needed," Slater said. The PIOs are requested via the Resource Ordering Status System. "Although most of the people working the JIC were local, some were brought in from Utah, Washington and California, all with experience working on large wildfires."

PIOs in the field worked in conjunction with those at the center, providing



Public information professionals from Alaska and the Lower 48 assembled in the Bureau of Land Management as a joint information center was activated July 2. Members of the JIC used their expertise to answer questions and provide direction to citizens threatened by the Stuart Creek 2 Fire. (Photo by Mel Slater/Alaska Fire Service)

updates and safety information as it became available. Members of United States Army Garrison Fort Wainwright Public Affairs, the Fairbanks North Star Borough, Alaska Fire Service, Bureau of Land Management and U.S. Forestry continually answered phones and assisted

members of the community seeking answers.

As the blaze threatened homes along Chena Hot Springs Road, an evacuation advisory watch turned into an evacuation advisory.

"It was rewarding being able to provide our neighbors with accurate, up-to-date information

in a time of need and for the most part people appreciated the immediate response," said Billie Tewalt, FNSB Mayor's office. Some callers were surprised to get a live body at the other end of the phone, expecting a recorded message.

As of Wednesday, the fire had burned 85,475

acres and was 57-percent contained. Cooler weather and a solid fire line running from the northeast of the fire to its west side and south have kept it in check.

Although the JIC is no longer active, fire information is available by calling 356-5511 or visiting www.fire.ak.blm.gov.

Arctic Beast challenge breaks the ice, bends the bar



Spc. Chris Spadaro, 25th Brigade Support battalion, 1st Stryker Brigade Combat Team, 25th Infantry Division was the push/pull King during the Arctic Beast competition with a dead-lift of 620 pounds and 425 pound bench press.

Story and photos by Allen Shaw, Fort Wainwright PAO

The sweat poured, iron clanked and muscles pumped Saturday at Melaven Gym as 20 competitors entertained more than one-hundred cheering spectators during the first ever Fort Wainwright Arctic Beast contest.

The competition was the brain child of Benji Ehlers, an employee with the Directorate of Family and Morale, Welfare and Recreation and two-time runner-up in his weight class at the national North American Strongman Championships, and Rich Pulignani, sports and recreation specialist. "It's a hybrid of a weight lifting contest," Ehlers said, "We combined a mixture of power-lifting, a little bit of strongman challenge and a body-weight challenge, to get as many people with different training styles

involved in a day of fun."

As competitors moved from event to event the athletes demonstrated camaraderie and support for each other, offering tips on form and style while cheering and screaming for each other. Ehlers said, "It's a great opportunity for friends to get together, lift weights and make some noise."

Both men and women competed and they came in all shapes and sizes. Capt. Sarah Walker, 1st Battalion, 52nd Aviation Regiment, United States Army Alaska Aviation Task Force had her infant son, Urijah in a car seat close by as she cranked several large plates on the bar and performed a successful dead-lift. His little t-shirt read, "My mom is stronger than your dad."

Another competitor, Spc. Juan Gonzalez, 1st Battalion, 5th Infantry Regiment, 1st Stryker Brigade Combat Team, 25th In-

fantry Division who some would consider a behemoth, sported a tank top that read, "Strong is the new skinny".

All-in-all it appeared that everyone was having a blast. Spec. Mark Yost, 1st Battalion, 24th Infantry Division, 1-25 SBCT said, "This is a great morale builder, it's good for the sport and it's a good time for those who like to lift."

Ehlers said these types of competitions are becoming more and more popular in the Lower 48 and at several other Army installations. "We just always try to bring something new to the Soldiers, Family members and civilian workers on Fort Wainwright, and are hoping this sets a trend."

The organizers attribute the success and number of competitors to word-of-mouth. "We see a lot of these guys in the weight room, deal with them as clients and have been building a rapport with our

patrons," Ehlers said "they trust us and knew we would put together a quality event."

Pulignani was also pleased with the turn-out. "It went well," he said. "The dead-lift was awesome; people enjoyed it, appreciated the rules and were excited to participate." He also said he appreciated the encouragement they got from leadership. "We got the awards we asked for and that was great." They handed out certificates and t-shirts to the winning competitors.

Although resources were limited for the event, Ehlers was optimistic. "We were able to make do with what we got, but with more support, supplies and a little bigger budget, this type of thing can really grow," he said. "This was a stepping stone for us, to prove to ourselves that we could do it with what we had, but now we are ready to take it to the next level and are already thinking large scale."

2013 Fort Wainwright's Arctic Beast Challenge Results

Winners:

Push/Pull King: Chris Spadaro, bench press, 425 pounds, deadlift-620 pounds

Push/Pull Queen: Sara Walker, bench press, 140 pounds, deadlift-245 pounds

Overall Arctic Beast: Mark Page (180.6 pounds), Men's 181 pounds and under: bench press, 305 pounds, dead-lift, 425 pounds, clean and press for max reps in 2 min, 135 pounds - 26 reps (tied for 1st place), 5-burpee pull up plus 100-foot shuttle run AMRAP in 8 minutes, 12 rounds (1st place)

Overall Arctic Beastette: Sara Walker (154.0 pounds), Women's Division: bench press, 140 pounds, dead-lift, 245 pounds, clean and press for max reps in 2 min, 95 pounds - 22 reps, 5-burpee pull up plus 100-foot shuttle run AMRAP in 8 minutes, 9 rounds (1st place)

Highlights:

Lightweight Women Division: Vanessa Cardenas, bench press, 120 pounds at 109-pound bodyweight

Lightweight Men Division: John Navarro, dead-lift, 465 pounds at 175-pound bodyweight

Middle weight Men Division: Charlie Hulse, bench press, 325 pounds at 185-pound bodyweight, burpee pull ups plus shuttle run, 10 rounds plus 3 reps, (3rd place overall Arctic Beast)

Mark Yoest, dead-lift, 465 pounds at 208 - pound bodyweight, Runner-up Arctic Beast winner - (2nd place)

Corey J. Isom, bench press, 315 pounds, dead-lift, 455 pounds at 216-pounds bodyweight, burpee pull ups plus shuttle run, 10 rounds plus 1 rep

Joseph Droke, dead-lift, 425 pounds at 194-pounds bodyweight

Heavy weight Men Division: Jordan Betts, bench press, 385 pounds, dead-lift, 605 pounds at 291-pounds bodyweight

Alex Boudreau, dead-lift, 600 pounds at 260-pounds bodyweight, clean and press for max reps of 135 pounds x 26 reps (tied for 1st place), burpee pull ups plus shuttle run, 10 rounds plus 4 reps

Tony Gonzalez, clean and press for max reps, 135 pounds x 24 reps (2nd place) 4th place overall Arctic Beast at 275-pounds bodyweight

Benji Ehlers, event coordinator said, "The competition was about strength, speed, power, endurance and most importantly efficiency in movement and technique. The top winners demonstrated all these qualities."



Capt. Sara Walker, 1st Battalion, 52nd Aviation Regiment, United States Army Alaska Aviation Task Force blasted as many 95-pound overhead presses as she could in a designated time period. After knocking out a blistering 22 reps in two minutes, Walker was done and happy to drop the bar. She was also crowned the push/pull Queen with a bench press of 140 pounds and 245 pound dead-lift.



LEFT - Spc. Mark Yost, 1st Battalion, 24th Infantry Regiment, 1st Stryker Brigade Combat Team, 25th Infantry Division bends the bar Saturday at Melaven Gym during the Arctic Beast dead-lift competition.

RIGHT - Spc. Tony Gonzalez, 1st Battalion, 5th Infantry Regiment, 1st Stryker Brigade, 25th Infantry Division came in 4th place overall during the Arctic Beast challenge, Saturday at Melaven Gym.



Former Fort Wainwright Soldier featured on news channel documentary

Allen Shaw,
Fort Wainwright PAO

I first met Sgt. Stephen Jackel when he rejoined his unit in Alaska for the 1st Stryker Brigade Combat Team, 25th Infantry Division Wounded Warrior and Gold Star Family walk at Fort Wainwright, May 17, 2012. I was simply there to capture a few photos, but went away with so much more. He became one of the many Soldiers who have touched my heart. I never forgot him. He was such an inspiration that day, running the final 100 meters to the finish line with one prosthetic leg and a charismatic smile from ear to ear. As I choked back a tear watching him raise his hands above his head signifying victory, he ran right to me and embraced me as if we were old friends. He then hugged everyone else who was within reach. Jackel was just very happy to be there and I could tell this Soldier was special. I knew he was going to be okay and every time I feel overwhelmed or defeated, I think of Jackel. I've told his story many times over a variety of beverages.

Jackel was deployed with the 73rd Engineer Company, Brigade Troops Battalion, 1st Stryker Brigade Combat Team, 25th Infantry Division in support of Operation Enduring Freedom in 2011. In August of that year Jackel lost his right leg while conducting combat missions in Southern Kandahar, Afghanistan.

While performing convoy security duties, an IED exploded under the vehicle he occupied with his team. After the blast, Jackel saved the lives of his team members by helping get them out of the vehicle while he physically put out a fire inside the cab with his own broken leg. "I kept lifting my leg and beating it against the fire," he said. The injuries he sustained eventually required bilateral leg amputations due to complications with difficulty and pain.

Jackel served multiple tours in Iraq and Afghanistan. He is not only a Purple Heart recipient, but also has an Army Commendation Award for Valor and an Afghanistan Campaign



Former Army Sgt. Stephen Jackel lost both legs due to combat missions in Southern Kandahar, Afghanistan in 2011. Last year he was hand-picked to dive with Operation: Blue Pride. (Photo by Sean Havas/Courtesy Stephen Jackel)

Medal with two Bronze Stars, among others. Now he is the recipient of a custom home being built in Little Elm, Texas.

A documentary that aired on CNN Sunday told the story of the work being done by Dan Wallrath, a homebuilder from Texas who was honored as a CNN Hero of the Year in 2010. The program will be shown again Sunday and Jackel and his Family are part of the show.

Out of the blue, I thought of Jackel on Veterans Day and wondered what he was up to, so I started doing a little research. It didn't take long before I found him linked to a group called Operation: Blue Pride. They said, "Stephen is an amazing American," gave me his email address and I sent him a note. Last week I was surprised by a phone call. It was the first I learned about his adventure with the television program and Operation Finally Home.

Jackel said how grateful he was and told me he's doing great. He was very excited about being part of Operation: Blue Pride. "I feel alive, scuba diving," he said. "I never want to get out of the water."

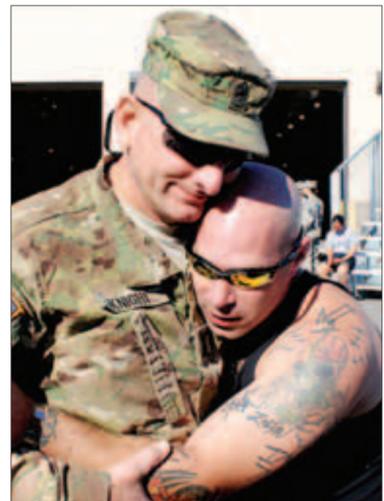
The mission of Operation: Blue Pride is twofold – it not only brings attention to the difficulties facing our oceans, but

also helps severely wounded American veterans facing lifelong challenges after returning home from combat.

In the beginning, the ocean conservationists who developed the program hand-selected three veterans to participate and Jackel was one of them. "I had never scuba-dived before and now I help instruct other Wounded Warriors," he said. He also spends his time as a motivational speaker. "If you have the courage to face each day – get out of bed and do what we must do, everything will work out. I want to spread this message to as many people as I can."

The Jackel Family found out about being chosen as the recipients of a custom, mortgage-free home when they were invited to a Kix Brooks concert at the 2013 Country Fair in San Antonio, last month. From the stage, Jackel, wife Adrianna and their six children learned that their home would be built.

"It is an honor to provide a home for this brave young man and his Family," said Tim Jackson, president, Tim Jackson Custom Homes. "It means so much to be able to give something back to this local hero in appreciation for his service and sacrifice to our country."



Command Sgt. Maj. Bernie Knight, Senior noncommissioned officer for U.S. Army Alaska, embraces Sgt. Stephen Jackel, a Wounded Warrior. Jackel lost his right leg while conducting combat missions serving with 1st Stryker Brigade Combat Team, 25th Infantry Division in Southern Kandahar, Afghanistan. He rejoined his unit in Alaska for the Wounded Warrior and Gold Star Family walk May 17, 2012. (File photo by Sgt. Thomas Duval/ 1-25th SBCT PAO)

I watched the program on CNN and was happy to see that my friend, although we only shared a few special moments of celebrating a victory together under the midnight sun, was well and as I suspected – was doing just fine.

He called me Tuesday and we chatted about the show, the progress on the home and how he has played the cards that were dealt him. "I'm not going to lie," he said, "some days are more difficult than others, but I am here and every day I strive to do my best; and everyday it gets a little better." As always, hearing my friend's voice lifted my spirit.

For more information on Operation Finally Home, tune into CNN or visit www.operationfinallyhome.com.

For more information on Operation: Blue Pride, visit www.operationbluepride.com.