

Mighty Hawkeye News

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The Story Behind Pedro66

In Remembrance of CPT Dave Wisniewski

A visit to an Air Force museum as a kindergartner inspired Capt. David A. Wisniewski to join the service. His strong Catholic convictions motivated him to become a helicopter pilot, placing his own life in jeopardy as he rescued injured people in combat zones.

"He didn't want to drop bombs from 40,000 feet and kill people," said his father, Chet Wisniewski.

"He wanted to save people. That's what he trained to do, and that's what he wanted to do."

- Chet Wisniewski

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CPT DAVE WISNIEWSKI

David Wisniewski's HH-60G Pave Hawk crashed in Afghanistan on June 9 — reportedly after a rocket-propelled grenade shot it down as the crew prepared to evacuate wounded British troops. Four airmen on board were killed.

Wisniewski, the aircraft's pilot, was one of three injured. He died from his wounds July 2 at National Medical Center in Bethesda, Md.

"He never quite recovered," Chet Wisniewski said. "We weren't trying to give anybody false hopes, but it was a massive head injury. He couldn't overcome it."

Wisniewski, a 31-year-old Iowa native and 2002 Air Force Academy graduate, served with the 66th Rescue Squadron at Nellis Air Force Base, Nev. He was on his seventh deployment, his father said. Wisniewski flew more than 1,500 hours — including 289 combat hours — during his eight-year career, according to a Nellis press release.

His squadron commander, Lt. Col. Thomas Dorl, praised Wisniewski's response to a mass casualty in Afghanistan that involved shuttling 40 people to safety.

"This was no small feat as he braved enemy action and flew into a hot landing zone three times to save people who [he] did not even know," Dorl said.

Killed the day of the crash were Lt. Joel C. Gentz, Staff Sgt. David C. Smith, Tech. Sgt. Michael P. Flores and Senior Airman Benjamin D. White.

It was the deadliest day for Air Force personnel at war in more than five years, and the transfer of the four airmen's remains drew the secretary of the Air Force, chief of staff and chief master sergeant of the Air Force to Dover Air Force Base, Del., to pay their respects.

The two airmen injured in the crash, Capt. Anthony Simone and Tech. Sgt. Christopher Aguilera, both of the 66th Rescue Squadron, are recovering at Brooke Army Medical Center, Texas.

Chet Wisniewski said his son took his girlfriend on a cruise to Mexico last November and proposed. The two planned to marry Sept. 4 in Las Vegas.

Instead, he will be interred Aug. 23 at Arlington National Cemetery.

During his stay in Bethesda, colleagues from around the world came to visit Wisniewski. It was, his father said, fitting for a man who aimed to improve others' lives.

"If I were to write an epitaph on his gravestone," Chet Wisniewski said, "it would be, 'He truly made a difference in the lives of the people he touched.'"

Captain Wisniewski is the 13th Air Force Academy graduate killed while supporting operations Iraqi Freedom and Enduring Freedom. His awards and decorations include the Purple Heart, three Air Medals and two Air Force Commendation Medals. He is now lain to rest where heroes are buried, Arlington National Cemetery.

Ranger Challenge

*CDT Joe Junker and CDT Ashlee Szewc's
Words on Training and Competing*

CDT Joe Junker - Ranger Challenge Team Captain

As a third year ROTC student and the Ranger Challenge Team Captain, I learned that the value of competitions like Ranger Challenge is not in the pride of winning, but in the true growth you experience during it. Ranger Challenge is a grueling competition comprised of various military and fitness skills, where you are pitted against other ROTC programs. While our ultimate goal was to compete at Sandhurst, the prestigious international military competition, we unfortunately fell short of victory. However, the experience of Ranger Challenge transcends the glory of victory, it's about personal development, resilience, and the close friends you make along the way. I know this because I experienced it.

When I was 18, I had just moved to Iowa City to start my first semester at the University of Iowa. I had thought about joining the military before, but ROTC did not cross my mind until I had met with Mr. Wolf. My parents and 3 of my siblings were in the military, but I still did not know much about it. I had no scholarship and barely knew anyone. I woke up for the first day of PT at 5 a.m. and walked to where it was. I barely knew anyone except for another classmate I had met 2 days prior. That's when CDT Blake Misfeldt, the Ranger Challenge Captain at the time, stepped forward and talked about Ranger Challenge.

I didn't listen to his speech. It was 5 a.m. and I was totally disoriented, barely awake, and didn't feel like this was my place to be. I did catch the last thing he said though, that the first day of tryouts will be today, and that anyone interested should join him to do his own workout. I saw the one classmate I had met start walking, and I didn't know anyone else, so I joined him.

That workout was rigorous, a lot more exercise than I had done in a while. After that, every day seemed to be a more heinous workout than the last. Eventually, the tryouts ended, and I was anxiously waiting to receive an email stating who had made the team.

I expected to not make it. There was simply no way they were going to put an out of shape freshman who didn't know anything about Army skills on the team. However, the email I received was a pleasant surprise. I had made the 9-man team, the team with the most physically fit and knowledgeable cadets. There was also the 5-man team, that had amazing cadets on it, but it seemed like the 9-man team was where the best of the best would go. So, to be the sole freshman that had made this team was quite the shock. I felt validation for my efforts and a new challenge to rise to the occasion.

After that, my time in ROTC was a blast. I got to go to the competitions and do exciting things. I got to make friends with upperclassmen who generously shared their knowledge and experiences. I developed myself as a leader and became less afraid of failure.



RANGER CHALLENGE CAPTAIN CDT JUNKER (LEFT) NEXT TO CDT BECHTEL (RIGHT)

I got to attend Sandhurst my freshman year and compete in a coveted military competition. I received a 3-year scholarship, relieving me of doubts about being able to stay in school. After my sophomore year, I got to go to Air Assault School, and that was an amazing opportunity that I wouldn't have had without Ranger Challenge.

This year, I was honored to be named captain of the Ranger Challenge team. My training regimen focused on balancing the physical and mental abilities needed in the competition. On Mondays and Wednesdays, we would run 2 miles and then dedicate the rest of the time we had to various military skills. Tuesdays, we would do hands-on weapons training, involving disassembling and reassembling the weapons. Fridays, we would dedicate to physical training entirely. My team was motivated, hardworking, and exceptional cadets. This group became incredibly close. Leading up to the competition, I was nervous, but also confident in my team. I knew that whatever adversity was thrown at us, we would succeed.

Our execution wasn't strong enough, however. We made simple mistakes that cost us points during the competition. The physical events were much harder than we had anticipated, causing us to struggle to keep up. When the competition was over, not only did we fail to win for the first time in years, but we didn't even make the podium. At first, I was disappointed in myself. But over the course of a few weeks, I realized that the success of Ranger Challenge is not measured in wins and losses. It's in the friends you make, the skills you develop, and the personal growth experienced. Every single member on that team is better off than if they hadn't done Ranger Challenge, and I can say that confidently. This realization would not have come to me, if I was not in that leadership role. I had the privilege to see the growth and development that I experienced myself in the Cadets that I trained this year. That, to me, is the true victory. Overall, I am incredibly proud of my team, and I hope that future cadets can see the benefit of Ranger Challenge and have a great experience, just as I did.



CDT ASHLEE SZEWC (LEFT) & SFC TAYLOR (RIGHT)

CDT Ashlee Szewc - Team Member Perspective

At the beginning of the semester when Ranger Challenge was introduced to the Battalion I decided that I didn't want to do it. I thought I had too busy of a schedule and wanted to let younger cadets have the opportunity. It wasn't until after Ranger Challenge captain Cadet Junker said he was in desperate need for females to make the teams plausible that I decided to step up. It was a difficult decision to make but in the end I am glad that I joined the team. I eventually agreed to join because I wanted the other sixteen male cadets to have the opportunity to compete.

A week before the competition disaster struck. While at FTX I sprained my wrist and was instructed by my doctor that I could not do any upper body workout and had to be in a brace. I was so distraught because I knew this may put me out of the competition and hinder my team's ability to compete. I discussed my options and ended up going to the competition. While at the competition I modified the tasks so that way I could help my team the best way possible. This injury significantly altered my ability to compete, but I knew I needed to do the best I could to help place in the competition.

Reflecting back on my time I would have never expected to even be a part of the team. I am so glad I joined because I made some of my best memories in ROTC with the Ranger Challenge team. I also had the great opportunity to gain more hands-on experience with weapons training and medical knowledge. This is important because I have more confidence about my soldier ability before going to Advanced Camp this summer.

CTLT

CDT Reinhardt's Experience

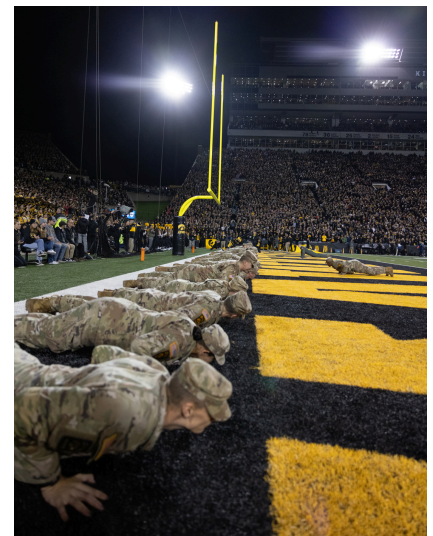
I had the opportunity to shadow a PL with the 570th Combat Engineer Company at JBLM. While there, I was lucky enough to conduct an FTX at Yakima Training Center for half my time there. I was previously warned about this place before coming. To sum it up it is a dust bowl that is a 5-hour drive, by convoy, from JBLM. We left for Yakima two days after I got to Washington. At Yakima, we trained on M4s, Grenade launchers, vehicle trenches, C-wire obstacles, force-on-force, and my favorite, Demo. I learned how a Company plans and coordinates large FTXs. Throughout the FTX, I stayed hands-on and learned from many PLs, sergeants, and the Company Commander.

My favorite memory from CTLT was getting to know the people in the soldiers in 3rd platoon. The squad leaders were very down to earth, and I shared many interests with them, making it easy to talk to them. Some soldiers shared a lot about their time in college and why they chose to enlist instead of going the officer route, which enlightened me on the perception of officers. Any downtime we had was spent connecting and networking. Every person I met and interacted with helped me learn and grow as a leader.

Luckily, I got to explore the area surrounding JBLM. We had our weekends off and only worked during business hours, so we were left with time to do our own thing. We were fortunate to have a four-day weekend and a group of cadets, and I took full advantage of it. We spent a bunch of time in Tacoma, wandered around Downtown Seattle, and spent our last day at the Washington State Fair. It was always fun to spend time with my fellow Cadets. We spent a lot of time talking to each other about the things we were learning from our sponsors and talking about our CST experiences.



Fall 2024 Homecoming Collage



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