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41 YEARS OF MILITARY SERVICE, LIFETIME FAMILY MAN

Story by Mike Chrisman,
Illinois National Guard Public Affairs

SPRINGFIELD, IL — Maj. Gen. Dennis Celletti of Springfield has always made time for both his military and civilian family. After 41 years, he is saying farewell to his family in the Illinois Army National Guard.



MAJ. GEN. DENNIS CELLETTI

“He holds a strong bond to family life. His ability to manage the busy life of the Guard and then take time to spend time with all of us is unbelievable,” said Celletti’s only son, Maj. Jason Celletti of Springfield, Ill., with Headquarters and Headquarters Company, 33rd Infantry Brigade Combat Team in

Urbana. “As a father and grandfather he is very committed to ensure that he is at events like football games, volleyball games and even just the family cook outs.”

Celletti commissioned as a second lieutenant in 1976 and will retire May 31 as the Assistant Adjutant General-Army for the Illinois National Guard.

“In order to be a professional, you have to have a professional career and my wife and family have always understood that and been very supportive and that makes it easier to balance,” Celletti said. “When I have had time, I have gone out of my way to have family time and that’s important.”

Jason said his dad always taught him the Illinois Army National Guard was a family that instills the common threads of commitment, service, dedication and caring. While his dad was extremely busy with work, Jason said he always found time to attend sporting events and volunteer with the Boy Scouts.

Jason said the birth of his daughter Milana brought out a side of the general that many never see.

“The strong, stern major general just melts in her hands,” Jason said. “Just the other night she was coloring in her book and like any 2-year old, she missed the page. Sure enough it put a big green streak on the white carpet. What would have been a scold or life lesson for me, for her it was; ‘Oh it will wash out, no big deal.’”

Celletti admits his granddaughter tugs at his heart.

“I’ve missed a lot of family time in my career and

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On a May day in 2007, one Soldier’s life changed forever- and nearly ended

“I almost died, several times,” said Col. Gregory Gadson, about the minutes and first few hours after his vehicle hit an IED in Iraq, causing severe injuries to both his legs and his right arm. “But now, six years later, I am flourishing, still on active duty and with a good quality of life expectation.” He was serving as commander of the 2nd Battalion, 32nd Field Artillery, in Iraq at the time. Today he serves as installation commander of Fort Belvoir, Va.

Gadson began his odyssey from the site of the IEC blast in Balad, Iraq, on May 7 to a combat support hospital in Baghdad; from there he was flown to Landstuhl Military Medical Center in Germany, and finally on to Walter Reed Army Medical Center in Washington, D.C. Gadson says he doesn’t remember much of the trip. “I went through 129 units of whole blood and plasma that first night,” he said. “By May 11 I was in Walter Reed. I don’t remember Landstuhl at all,” he said.

After arriving at WRAMC Gadson spent 44 days as an inpatient. Gadson eventually lost both legs above the knee and today has reduced use of his right arm due to his upper right arm and elbow being broken.

“I’ve had 16 surgeries on my legs,” Gadson said, “and four on my arm. I still have some nerve damage. I’ve talked to some people who think they can make it better. But, for now I don’t plan on any more surgery,” he said.

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Gadson said he relied on friends and family as his primary support group during his recovery. And the Army’s support system for Wounded Warriors was there for him when he needed it.



U.S. Army photo

Col. Gregory Gadson takes part in a Sexual Harassment/Assault Response and Prevention (SHARP) 5K awareness run at Fort Belvoir, Md. Gadson is a double amputee as a result of injuries suffered in Iraq and serves as the installation commander at Fort Belvoir.

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(U.S. Navy photos by Mass Communication Specialist Seaman Pyoung K. Yi/HIPAA Complete)
 (above) Army Sgt. Jose Martinez, assigned to Naval Medical Center San Diego's (NMCS) Warrior Transition Unit-Bravo detachment, rides a wave at Del Mar Beach during the fifth anniversary of NMCS's surf clinic. More than 45 patients, family members and community volunteers have participated in the clinic. The goal is to rehabilitate wounded, ill and injured service members through exercise and recreational therapy to improve their level of function and mobility.

(below) Retired Marine Sgt. Michael Spibey, former patient at Naval Medical Center San Diego's (NMCS) Wounded Warrior Battalion-West detachment, catches a wave at Del Mar Beach during the fifth anniversary of NMCS's surf clinic.



(U.S. Navy photos by Mass Communication Specialist 2nd Class Jessica L. Tounzen/Released)

Color Guard

(above) The Naval Medical Center San Diego (NMCS) command color guard stands by prior to raising the colors during a monthly awards ceremony coinciding with morning colors at NMCS. During the ceremony a total of 13 Navy enlisted and officers received three Meritorious Service Medals, one Joint Service Commendation Medal, three Navy Commendation Medals, and six Navy Achievement Medals.

(left) The Naval Medical Center San Diego (NMCS) command color guard prepares to raise the colors during a monthly awards ceremony.

(bottom left) The Naval Medical Center San Diego (NMCS) command color raises the colors during a monthly awards ceremony coinciding with morning colors at NMCS.



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Occupational therapy: skills for the job of living

By Airman 1st Class Stephan Coleman
81st Training Wing

KEESLER AIR FORCE BASE, Miss. — It looks like any other medical office, with white walls and tables for patients to lie on, but the gadgets around the room are unusual. There is a short tree of clothespins on a counter next to a model of a hand with no skin. Another counter has a bin of hot, melted wax on it.

The occupational therapy office at Keesler Medical Center, headed by Capt. Laura Dossett, uses a variety of rehabilitative devices to help injured patients accomplish everyday tasks.

“Dossett is passionate about the career field and it shows daily as she works with all kinds of different symptoms, injuries and surgeries,” said Senior Airman Coe Rangel, 81st Surgical Operations Squadron. “She is new to the Air Force but not to occupational therapy, so we’ve had a pretty successful turnaround with patients.”

As there are less than 20 OTs in the Air Force, Dossett’s title is rare and may be misunderstood by those who are unfamiliar with this particular niche of therapy.

“Occupations refer to everyday tasks, the things we do on a regular basis,” said Dossett. “Getting dressed is an occupation. So is brushing your teeth and everything you do at work. It’s everything you do in a day.”

Dossett helps patients with carpal tunnel syndrome, thumb and wrist pain, tennis elbow, sprains, strains and post-surgery restrictions. Most of her patients have ailments from repetitive use.

Treatment is described as a continuum, starting with handling pain and swelling. Once those symptoms are regressed, patients are assisted with range of motion, strengthening and functional usage, respectively. Not all ailments can be cured, however, said Dossett.

“Sometimes you can fix a problem,” Dossett said. “Sometimes you just need to adapt.”

The OT office has many gadgets to assist in adapting to occupational problems, or at least reducing pain, including custom splints, paraffin wax treatment, fluidotherapy, ice packs and heating packs.

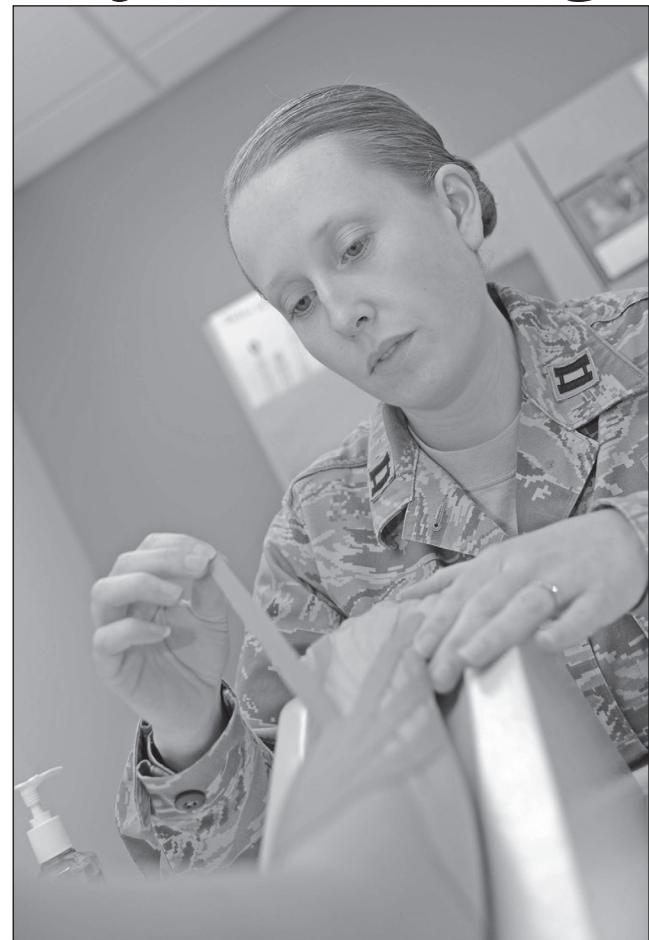
For many reasons, occupational therapy is slightly different in the Air Force compared to the civilian world. The overall career field assists with a vast amount of daily troubles, but

Dossett mainly deals with elbow, wrist and hand injuries and ailments. Even with the narrowed scope, Dossett says she has more freedom with her patients in the Air Force.

“Freedom with patients is obstructed in the civilian world,” said Dossett. “Here there isn’t the pressure to spend time with certain patients and I can help those that need it most.”

(U.S. Air Force photo by Kemberly Groue)

Capt. Laura Dossett, 81st Surgical Operations Squadron occupational therapist, applies kinesio tape on a patient’s arm for edema management May 3, 2013, at the Keesler Medical Center, Keesler Air Force Base, Miss. Dossett is Keesler’s only occupational therapist and works primarily with arm, wrist and hand ailments that restrict every-day tasks.



(U.S. Navy photos by Mass Communication Specialist Seaman Pyoung K. Yi/Released)

Mayor visits NMCSI

San Diego Mayor Bob Filner (left) speaks with Brian Zalewski (right), head prosthetist at Naval Medical Center San Diego (NMCS) during a visit to NMCS’s Comprehensive Combat and Complex Casualty Care (C5) facility. The goal of the visit was for Filner to learn about wounded, ill and injured medical capabilities here.



Rear Adm. C. Forrest Faison III, commander, Naval Medical Center San Diego (NMCS) and Navy Medicine West (left) shares a laugh with the San Diego Mayor Bob Filner (right) during a visit to NMCS’s Comprehensive Combat and Complex Casualty Care (C5) facility. The goal of the visit was for Filner to learn about wounded, ill and injured medical capabilities here.

June Is
National Flag
Month

The D-Day Invasion at Normandy - June 6, 1944

Invasion Date	June 6, 1944 – The D in D-Day stands for “day” since the final invasion date was unknown and weather dependent
Allied Forces	156,000 Allied troops from The United States, The United Kingdom, Canada, Free France and Norway
Areas of Invasion	The Allied code names for the beaches along the 50-mile stretch of Normandy coast targeted for landing were Utah, Omaha, Gold, Juno and Sword. Omaha was the costliest beach in terms of Allied casualties.
The Armada	5,000 ships and landing craft 50,000 vehicles 11,000 planes
Commanders	United States – Dwight D. Eisenhower, Omar Bradley The United Kingdom – Bernard Law Montgomery, Trafford Leigh-Mallory, Arthur Tedder, Miles Dempsey, Bertram Ramsay Germany – Erwin Rommel, Gerd von Rundstedt, Friedrich Dollmann
Casualties	Numbers represent total killed, wounded, missing or captured United States – 6,603 (1,465 killed) United Kingdom – 2,700 Canada – 1,074 (359 fatal) Germany – Estimated between 4,000 – 9,000
The Outcome	By June 11, with the beachheads firmly secured, more than 326,000 troops had crossed with more than 100,000 tons of military equipment. Paris was liberated on August 25. Germany surrendered on May 8, 1945.
Veterans Today	The number of remaining D-Day vets is estimated anywhere between 8,000 and 60,000. The Veterans Administration has detailed numbers on total WWII vets remaining available at www.nationalww2museum.org/the-greatest-generation



Supreme Allied Commander U.S. Army Gen. Dwight D. Eisenhower speaks with 101st Airborne Division paratroopers before they board airplanes and gliders to take part in a parachute assault into Normandy as part of the Allied Invasion of Europe, D-Day, June 6, 1944.

The National World War II Museum tells the story of the American Experience in the war that changed the world – why it was fought, how it was won, and what it means today. Dedicated in 2000 as The National D-Day Museum and now designated by Congress as America’s National World War II Museum, it celebrates the American Spirit, the teamwork, optimism, courage and sacrifice of the men and women who fought on the battlefield and the Home Front. For more information, call 877-813-3329 or 504-527-6012 or visit www.nationalww2museum.org. Follow us on Twitter at WWIImuseum or visit our Facebook fan page.



German troops surrender to Soldiers during the Allied Invasion of Europe, D-Day, June 6, 1944.



(above) Soldiers of the 16th Infantry Regiment, wounded while storming Omaha Beach, wait by the chalk cliffs for evacuation to a field hospital for treatment, D-Day, June 6, 1944.



(left) Members of a landing party help injured Soldiers to safety on Utah Beach during the Allied Invasion of Europe on D-Day, June 6, 1944.



The spirit of the American Soldier: this beachhead is secure. Fellow Soldiers erected this monument to an American Soldier somewhere on the shell-blasted coast of Normandy.

★ Family man

Continued from page 1

it makes you enjoy the precious times even more," Celletti said. "Others have said kids bring out a side of me that most people haven't seen before."

There are many experiences that stand out to Celletti during his career. However, the proudest moments involve his family and watching his son grow as a Soldier and leader.

"I feel proud, but it's not about what I have done. It's about what we have done and accomplished as an organization. We are a solid team. Everyone has the same goals and objectives. I hope I look back in 10 years and still see that we have the same attitude. That is what makes us the Guard.

— Maj. Gen. Dennis Celletti

"I am proud of my son because he has made all of the decisions on his own," he said. "He made all the right decisions and he is right where he needs to be and doing well. I am proud of him, but he is not following in my footsteps. He is making his own way through a professional organization doing what he wants to do."

Celletti became the first Assistant Adjutant General in Illinois history to achieve the rank of major general. He has served in the position since 2005 and advises the Adjutant General on all matters pertaining to the Illinois Army National Guard and its 10,000 Soldiers.

"I feel proud, but it's not about what I have done. It's about what we have done and accomplished as an organization," Celletti said. "We are a solid team. Everyone has the same goals and objectives. I hope I look back in 10 years and still see that we have the same attitude. That is what makes us the Guard."

Celletti grew up in Sterling, Ill., and followed several generations of family who donned a uniform.

"I saw what they did for our country and I felt the need to serve," Celletti said. "Our military is one percent of the population. If you break it down, it goes generation to generation of families serving. It's patriotism built in the genes and it keeps carrying on."

Over his lengthy career, Celletti made a lot of special connections across Illinois. However, the relationship he built in Woodstock, Ill., was different than many others. Company D, 1st Battalion, 178th Infantry in Woodstock lost four Soldiers when it deployed to Afghanistan in 2008 to 2009.

"I had the honor of working with several of the Gold Star families," Celletti said. "They are now part of the Illinois National Guard family and we will not forget their

loved ones who made the ultimate sacrifice to our nation."

Mark Greenleaf of Woodstock worked with Celletti several times when Celletti visited Woodstock and praised the general for his commitment to the military and community.

"You don't have to serve with Major General Celletti to understand how much he cares for the men and women in his command; a civilian like me could see it," Greenleaf said. "We're very grateful for the visits he made here when our Soldiers deployed to Afghanistan, when they returned from combat, and to honor our local veterans, our military families and our fallen. After his 40 years of distinguished service, I wish him a happy and well-earned retirement."

Over the course of a career, many individuals influenced Celletti and made him the leader he is today. Col. (ret.) Ray Perry of Springfield, Ill., was the commander of the 106th Cavalry in Rock Falls when Celletti first commissioned as a second lieutenant 37 years ago. Perry said he knew Celletti was going to be a solid leader for the Illinois National Guard.

"He was one of the hardest workers I have ever had in my formations," Perry said. "He did the best he could do and always stood up for what was right. He has become an amazing leader."

Celletti said some of the toughest assignments he had in his career have been when he was in command of a unit.

"It's tough when you are in the position, but looking back it was worth it to know Soldiers respected you and do what you want," he said. "They're doing it because they respect you."

Jason said his dad was a great leader, but his leadership is the reason the Illinois Army National Guard won't miss a beat when he retires.

"He once told me that if you do your job as a leader and trainer, then you will have full confidence in the Soldiers that will fill your shoes," Jason said.

Celletti's advice to young servicemembers is to never stop learning and always strive to improve. He also stressed the importance of looking after the people who are important.

"Take care of your family and fellow Soldiers and Airmen by doing the right thing and they will take care of you," he said.

Celletti has numerous awards including the Legion of Merit, Meritorious Service Medal and Army Commendation Medal.

Celletti jokingly said the top three things he plans to do when he retires are: golf, golf and more golf with some trips in the RV and occasional work in his woodshop.

"After several months together with my wife Kathy, I know she will make me do something to keep me busy and her sane," Celletti said. "So, until then, I may look for some good retirement job just to keep my mind sharp, but a job with a lot of flexibility to still do number one, number two and number three on my list."

Military tradition coming to Frederick

FORT DETRICK, MD. — On June 29, 2013 performers from the Old Guard Fife and Drum Corps and the U.S. Army Drill Team will converge into Baker Park at 6:30 p.m. This free and open to the public performance promises to entertain the crowd, through their music and precision.

The Old Guard Fife and Drum Corps is the only unit of its kind in the United States Armed Forces and is charged with maintaining some of America's oldest military music traditions. Their crisp drill and early American music represent the dedication, discipline and precision of the United States Army to our Nation and the world.

Created in 1960, as an element of The Old Guard, The Old Guard Fife and Drum Corps is one of only four Army premier musical organizations. The Fife and Drum Corps' uniforms, distinguished by the tricorne hat, white wig, and red colonial-style greatcoat, are patterned after those worn by the field musicians of the 1st American Regiment of 1784, to which The Old Guard traces its roots. The musicians' blue-trimmed red greatcoats were opposite in color to those worn by the infantry soldiers. This helped commanders identify their musicians through the smoke and confusion of the battlefield.

In 1948, The Old Guard selected the Army's finest Soldiers to concentrate on precise marching and crisp rifle drill. These Soldiers became what is known as The U.S. Army Drill Team. Although the original members are long gone, the rigid standards they established remain unchanged.

Trim military bearing, strength and dexterity are mandatory for qualification to the Drill Team. Soldiers on the Drill Team use bayonet-tipped 1903 Springfield rifles. Soldiers are selected for this elite team after 75 days of rigorous and competitive drill practice. These Soldiers and their performances are one of the finest examples of what hard training, constant practice and teamwork produces in today's Army.

The event is hosted by Fort Detrick, City of Frederick and the Fort Detrick Alliance. Observers are reminded to bring chairs. All interested media should contact the U.S. Army Garrison Fort Detrick Public Affairs Office at (301) 619-2018 or via email at usarmy.detrick.usag.mbx.pao@mail.mil

National Museum of Civil War Medicine to participate in Blue Star Museums

The National Museum of Civil War Medicine announced the launch of Blue Star Museums, a collaboration among the National Endowment for the Arts, Blue Star Families, the Department of Defense, and more than 1,500 museums across America to offer free admission to all active duty military personnel and their families (military ID holder and up to five family members) from Memorial Day through Labor Day 2013. Active duty military include Army, Navy, Air Force, Marines, Coast Guard, and active duty National Guard and active duty Reserve members.

"The NMCWM is proud to participate in this program. It was a great honor being a Blue Star Museum in 2011 and 2012. We are truly looking forward to serving the men and women of our armed forces again in 2013! These heroes give everything they have to our nation daily, this is one small way that we can say "thank you for your service," stated Executive Director George Wunderlich.

Leadership support has been provided by MetLife Foundation through Blue Star Families. The complete list of participating museums is available at www.arts.gov/bluestarmuseums

[1]. This year, more than 1,500 (and counting) museums in all 50 states, the District of Columbia, Puerto Rico, and American Samoa are taking part in the initiative, including more than 300 new museums this year.

To find out which museums are participating, visit www.arts.gov/bluestarmuseums [1]. The site includes a list of participating museums and a map to help with visit planning.

For more information about the National Museum of Civil War Medicine visit www.civilwarmed.org [2].



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Grand Re-opening



(U.S. Navy photos by Mass Communication Specialist Seaman Pyoung K. Yi/Released)

Rear Adm. C. Forrest Faison III, commander, Naval Medical Center San Diego (NMCSF) and Navy Medicine West, listens to a speaker during a ribbon-cutting ceremony commemorating Naval Branch Health Clinic Naval Training Center (NTC)'s grand re-opening. The clinic's 18-month renovation process included the addition of new lighting, locker rooms, exam rooms, medical records system, and upgraded laser suites for 20 departments. Naval Branch Health Clinic NTC offers a wide array of services including optometry, allergy, orthopedic, podiatry, and pharmacy. NTC also houses a large primary care clinic using the patient-centered Medical Home Port model to treat more than 15,000 active duty service members, retirees, and family members.

Commander, Naval Medical Center San Diego (NMCSF) and Navy Medicine West, Rear Adm. C. Forrest Faison III (center) along with NMCSF and Naval Branch Health Clinic Naval Training Center (NTC) leadership and NMCSF Facilities department project managers, celebrate NTC's grand re-opening during a ribbon-cutting ceremony.

★ Soldier

Continued from page 1

Part of that support system included Col. (Dr.) Paul Pasquina, currently Chair, Department of Physical Medicine and Rehabilitation Services at the Uniformed Services University, Bethesda, Md. Pasquina and Gadson were teammates on the football team at the U.S. Military Academy at West Point. During the early part of Gadson's hospitalization, Pasquina served as the Chief of Orthopedics and Rehabilitation at WRAMC, and supervised much of his treatment.

"On many levels," said Pasquina, "Gadson is an example to all of us, for his hard work, determination, and resilience. We played football together. Then, I knew him as an invincible athlete. Now, he's inspiring to be around, and I feel privileged to care for him."

During the 15 months of recovery, Gadson said he focused more on occupational therapy because it helps patients re-learn the skills needed for everyday life. Today, Gadson said he is more active than he was before his injuries. "I am a better skier now," he noted, "before I didn't really ski, but now I do. Because of the prosthetics you have to do some things differently when you're skiing," he said. As well as being a skier, Gadson is a scuba diver; he is also into cycling, traveling, and photography. He said hiking is the one activity he has given up.

While recovering, he signed up for a graduate education program. Today Gadson holds master degrees in information systems from Webster University and policy management

from Georgetown University.

"I'm just trying to continue to serve," Gadson said. "I've been promoted. And I was selected for a command position. I just make the most of every day," he said.

Gadson was a line backer on the football team when he attended West Point. A friend of his from the West Point football team, Mike Sullivan, now works for the New York Giants as an assistant coach. Sullivan arranged for Gadson to attend a game. Tom Coughlin, the New York Giants head coach, asked Gadson to meet with the then-struggling team. Gadson talked to the players about service, teamwork, duty, perseverance, and adversity. The team broke out of a losing streak and Gadson has served as their mentor ever since.

In April 2009 Gadson was the first bilateral amputee in the world to receive the second generation of the Ossur Power Knee prosthetic device. He is still working with researchers on modifications and improvements to the prosthetic.

"It's like bionic legs," Gadson said. "The power assist helps you walk. Unfortunately I don't have a pair to keep. I've tried to get them to give them to me."

Gadson's photograph appeared in a January 2010 story about robotics in "National Geographic." Pete Berg, one of the producers for the movie "Battleship" saw the photograph and got the idea to cast Gadson in the show. The show was filmed in Hawaii and Louisiana and released on May 18, 2012. It featured aliens coming to Earth with hostile intent. Gadson played an

Army officer called Mick in Hawaii, who takes on the aliens Rambo-style.

Critic David Edelstein in the New York Magazine said, "U.S. Army Colonel Gregory D. Gadson – former battalion leader who lost both legs in Iraq and has the no-b.s. charisma of Ving Rhames – plays a double-amputee who stages a one-man assault on an alien-commandeered relay station. The smug, reptilian aliens don't have a prayer, assuming they even believe in God, which I bet you anything they don't."

"It was a good experience," Gadson said, "but I think I'll wait until I retire before I do any more movies."

As well as working in a movie, and appearing in "National Geographic" Gadson has featured in stories in "Reader's Digest," "Success," "Home Life," and "Sports Illustrated."

Gadson's first military assignment after recovering was as director of the Army Wounded Warrior Program. He took over the AW2 in 2010 and acted as director until June 19, 2012. AW2 assists and advocates for severely wounded, ill and injured Soldiers and veterans. AW2 supports these Soldiers and their families throughout their recovery and transition, even into veteran status.

On July 25, 2012, Gadson took the reins as commander for Fort Belvoir, Va. Fort Belvoir has a population of 50,000 military, civilian and contractor employees. They provide logistical, intelligence, medical and administrative support for more than 140 different commands and agencies.

As a 24-year career Army officer Gadson said he was familiar with the

Army medical system before his injuries. However, spending time as a Wounded Warrior the last six years has made him realize the true capabilities of the system.

"I can honestly think of no other medical system in the world that can take such great care of some of the sickest folks there are," he said. "The thing that is significant about this generation of medical practitioners is that they are saving lives at an unprecedented rate. The military medical system not only saved my life," said Gadson, "but has allowed me to be all I can be. It's about more than saving lives – it's giving lives back."

"The military health care system is a very dynamic organization," said Pasquina, "military training programs are some of the best in the world. We provide unique training for military specific duties, and top notch education in medical specialties."

"We are all driven," said Pasquina, "by a higher calling to serve in a very rewarding profession. I'm very proud of my Army service and my ability to provide care to the patient. A career in the military offers opportunities for professional growth and to work alongside other professions. There is a high degree of camaraderie that can't be overstated. It's very rare to find a military health care person who is motivated by the salary; providing superior patient care is what drives us the most."

For more information on an Army Medicine career visit www.goarmy.com/amedd.

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Miscellaneous

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Illinois soldier spends Father's Day with step-daughter at annual training

By Staff Sgt. James McDonnough,
139th Mobile Public Affairs Detachment

With 13,000 Soldiers and Airmen in the Illinois National Guard, it is not uncommon for multiple generations of families to serve side-by-side. One

father celebrated this Father's Day serving beside his step-daughter during a two-week annual training exercise in Wisconsin.

Sgt. Tracy Wright, of St. Charles, a supply specialist with the Illinois Army National Guard's Battery A, 2nd Battalion, 122nd Field Artillery

Regiment in Sycamore, deployed to Operation Desert Storm as a Marine, before leaving the military to raise two stepdaughters and one son with Danielle, his wife of 14 years.

However, in 2009, at age 39, Wright decided it was time to get back in uniform.

"I missed the service and I missed the military," Wright said. "I was too old to go back to the Marines and the recruiter suggested the Illinois National Guard and that's what I did."

Danielle said she had mixed emotions about her husband returning to military service, but she ultimately knew it was the right decision.

"Part of me worried about his safety and his responsibilities at home," she said. "I asked him 'What about our family?' We couldn't have him gone. But there was another part of me that knew this is what he was meant to do."

Pvt. 1st Class Tayler Avery, of Maple Park, a chemical, biological, radioactive and nuclear specialist with the Illinois Army National Guard's 135th Chemical Company, 44th Chemical Battalion, 404th Maneuver Enhancement Brigade, based in Machesney Park, was a junior in high school when her stepfather, who she has called dad since age 5, joined the Illinois National Guard.

Avery said Wright made her a part of the process, which brought them closer together.

"When he decided he wanted to enlist in the National Guard, he had some weight to lose," Avery said. "At the time, I was running cross-country so it became a bonding experience for us. We would go on runs or work out every day and I thought it was cool being able to do stuff with my dad. Seeing him push himself was really great."

When Avery made the decision to enlist in the Illinois National Guard in 2011, it was Wright's turn to be proud of his stepdaughter's dedication.

"Of course I worry but I'm proud of both of them. I'm proud of the sacrifices they make and what they do for their country. I'm proud that Tracy has influenced Tayler enough that she wanted to follow in his footsteps."

— Danielle Wright



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★ Soldier

Continued from page 13

"I'm extremely proud of everything she's accomplished," he said. "When she was a teenager and looking for direction, I think she hit the mark and ran with it. She's taken everything in stride and really enjoys serving."

Avery said her stepfather provided encouragement and guidance from the time the idea of serving entered her mind at 17.

"I was working out with him and I started thinking about it as a real possibility," Avery said. "He was really supportive, and he would have been whether I decided to enlist or not. He was supportive but wasn't trying to push me toward it. He was just helpful and answered all of my questions. He even answered questions I didn't know I had yet."

Danielle said being a military wife and mother allows her to see how positive the National Guard has been for her family.

"Of course I worry but I'm proud of both of them," she said. "I'm proud of

Physicians



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the sacrifices they make and what they do for their country. I'm proud that Tracy has influenced Tayler enough that she wanted to follow in his footsteps."

She said Wright has always set the example for their three children and takes pride in being the best father he can be.

Physicians



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