

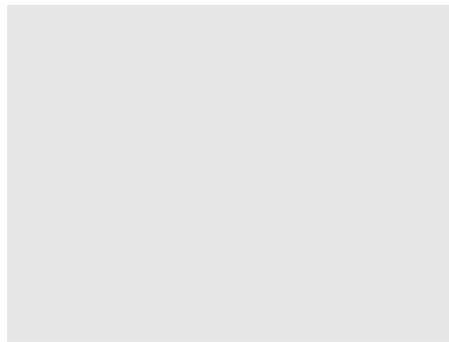
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MCFARLAND

Life of service includes nearly 20 years with Army National Guard

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Nathan Weier

Contributed



Nathan Weier's decision to join the Army National Guard was prompted by a comment from a member of his guard at age 17 as part of a split program, which allowed people to go through basic training the summer bef

Nathan Weier is the type of person who wants to serve others. It is evidenced at how he spends time outside of work.

Weier is a Cub Scout den leader, a member of the McFarland American Legion and serves with the McFarland EMS. He previously spent five years as a firefighter in Dodgeville and has coached T-ball.

“My entire life has kind of been about service,” Weier said. “It started when I was about 6 in Cub Scouts, and in 1997, I obtained Eagle Scout. And that’s when I learned about the Guard, because somebody at my Eagle Scout Court of Honor said, ‘I’d love to have an Eagle Scout in my foxhole.’ And he happened to be in the National Guard.”



At 17, the Dodgeville native decided to serve his country by enlisting in the Army National Guard as part of the split option program. Weier, who moved to McFarland with his family in 2014, attended basic training the summer before his senior year in high school. After graduating, he attended advanced individual training.

Weier, 36, began his enlistment as a heavy equipment operator with the 229 Engineer Company out of Platteville. He learned more about the other units within the Army National Guard after beginning college at UW-Richland Center. Weier transferred to the 147th Aviation Battalion out of Madison with hopes of becoming a pilot.

When the Sept. 11 terrorist attacks occurred, Weier decided to go full time with the Army National Guard.

“A lot of people say (active Guard) is the best kept secret in the Army, because you get all of the active duty pay and benefits, but you’re not going all over the country, you stay with the Guards,” Weier said.

He began his time with the active Guard as a personnel clerk. When the 229 Engineering Company was called to Iraq in 2003, Weier volunteered to go with the unit.

The 229 went to Fort McCoy in February 2003 to prepare all of the equipment. The United States had initially planned to invade Iraq from the north, but when Turkey and the United States attempted (and later failed) to negotiate a financial agreement, the 229 Engineering Company waited at Fort McCoy until May 2003 to enter the Middle East.

The unit spent a month in Kuwait until equipment, including bulldozers, scrapers, loaders and graders, arrived by boat before moving into Iraq.



“We spent our first night outside of Baghdad, and in the second night ,we rolled into Tikrit, which was Saddam (Hussein’s) hometown,” Weier said. “There were a lot of loyalists there, and between Tikrit, Mosul and Fallujah, that was called the Sunni

Triangle.”

The 229 Engineering spent six months building Camp Speicher, using bulldozers to create huge berms.

“In case the enemy came after our base, they had to run up this big pile of dirt,” he said. “Sitting on the other side was our guys with guns.”

The unit’s platoons were later tasked out to build up other bases in preparation for troops to arrive. The 229 Engineering also built roads and checkpoints between the cities. Part of this work involved blowing up two statues depicting Hussein. Weier received a coin for being a part of that detail.

He recalls during a down day, a sergeant asked if Weier would work on a bulldozer so one of the soldiers could eat. While taking up the task, Weier was asked to build a platform for a communication satellite.

“I jumped off the dozer to give it back, and here comes this lieutenant colonel to give me a coin for building this platform for him, so I got a coin for that,” he said.

He received another coin for taking on another task.

“It got to be a running joke. ‘Hey, Weier, can you do this for us?’ And I’d say, ‘Sure,’ and they’d be like ‘You’re not going to get a coin for it,’” Weier said.

He noted there were a lot of close calls during the deployment, but nothing resulted in fatalities.

“Being in Iraq taught me to never take anything for granted,” Weier said. “Life is short, so try to cram as much stuff as possible in.”

Upon returning from deployment in April 2004, he was promoted from records clerk to staff sergeant. Weier then transferred to human resources for staffing.

From there, Weier moved on to an administrative non-commissioned officer position for the 54th Civil Support Team, tasked with weapons of mass destruction.

“When we’d go out to missions and real-world events, I was the decon (decontamination) guy, so you’d have the guys go do their thing, they’d come back from the ‘hot zone’ and then I would spray them down with whatever took the stuff off,” he explained.

The McFarland resident held this position from 2007-09 before taking a commission as a warrant officer. Weier said as a warrant officer, he was a technical expert in personnel. In this position, he spent eight years managing the entire active duty program for the Wisconsin Army and Air National Guard.

Additionally, for four years, Weier spent one weekend a month teaching warrant officer school as a senior instructor at Fort McCoy.

“I enjoyed that,” he said. “The national accreditation team came in, and they pushed out what we did to other states, so that’s always cool when you do something that gets noticed enough to where it gets pushed out to other states and they start implementing it.”

Weier is now an administrative officer for the Wisconsin Army National Guard. His job entails taking care of the day-to-day accountability and personnel, mostly for the officers.

“The key phrase we use now is ‘personnel readiness,’” Weier said. “To make sure all the soldiers are up-to-date on their medical forms just in case we needed to pull to deploy, they’re all set.”

Weier will be eligible to retire from the National Guard at 40, but don't expect retirement to mean no longer working. He's looking to obtain a doctorate in emergency management after receiving a master's in emergency services management.

"I'll be ready to start another way to serve others," Weier said. "I love serving others and having a life of service."

Amber Gerber