

HOT

WE SHALL NOT FORGET

McFarland veteran Nicholas Krey deployed during Iraq war

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Nick Krey 2.jpg

McFarland resident Nicholas Krey knew most of his life that he wanted to join the military.

“Earliest I can remember saying to my mom I wanted to be in the army, I was six,” Krey said. “I never really wavered from that.”

While his grandfather did serve in the World War II era, rescuing downed pilots in the Arctic, Krey

said his inspiration to join the military came from within at an early age.

Krey served in the U.S. Army from 1997 to 2004. He joined the Army before he had even finished high school.

“I was anxious to get into the service as soon as possible,” Krey said.

He joined the Army Reserves as a junior in high school, and completed basic training between his junior and senior year of high school.





Two days after the last day of school, he arrived at Fort Leonard Wood to start training.

Because he was still in high school, Krey started in the reserves, because “you can’t be on active duty and then go back to high school.”

He continued to train for his role in chemical equipment repair which Krey said often led to careers in HVAC. However, Krey said he still had hopes of serving on active duty.

On Aug. 7, 1999, Krey had an experience that changed his military career. While traveling to annual training in California, Krey intervened in a medical emergency in the Minneapolis airport that earned him military recognition.

As he was walking through the terminal, Krey said he witnessed a woman collapse, having a seizure, and crack her skull on the floor. Krey’s military training kicked in, and he intervened.

“You take action first and you process afterwards,” he said.

Krey responded immediately, assessing her condition, contacting emergency medical services and ultimately saving her life.

“The only thing I had to stop the bleeding was my baseball cap,” Krey said.



While Krey said “it was a pivotal and crucial moment in my military career and trajectory,” he doesn’t like to talk about it much, out of humility.

“There was a woman who needed help, a guy helped her. A guy got a medal.”

Krey earned the Forces Command Heroes Achievement Award for the Army Reserves in 1999 for his actions that day.

After the event in the airport, Krey said he learned that his unit was no longer viable as a reserve unit, and was going to be disbanded. Instead of leaving the military, Krey was able to reenlist as active duty, in part due to his award.

From there, Krey retrained at Fort Knox, and was stationed at Fort Carson in Colorado, in the Third Armored Cavalry Regiment, which was constituted in 1846 and is the longest continuously-serving cavalry unit in the U.S.

Krey was stationed in Colorado on Sept. 11, 2001, and said he remembers the day vividly.

He remembers wearing civilian clothes, walking into a command post, and being sent to get into uniform while people were scrambling around the post. He sprinted a quarter-mile back to the barracks to change, turned on the television and saw the attack.

“Instantly knew what I was looking at... This is that moment that everything changes dramatically,” he recalled, saying he remembered being told that “from this point forward all the training that you’re going to do is going to be in preparation for your role in what’s coming.”

Krey deployed to Iraq for one year, during the last year of his service. Krey was a sergeant, a non-commissioned officer, and a cavalry scout.

For the first six months of his deployment, Krey helped protect and coordinate the movements of the colonel in charge in Al Anbar Province in Iraq. He worked to coordinate humvee and helicopter movements, to transport the



colonel around the province.

Krey said the role of many U.S. units in Iraq at that time were to try “to stabilize” and “rebuild Iraq.”

“Our role became to liaise with the local national community...to try to rebuild infrastructure,” he said. He said he remembers working with local residents of the province to help deliver power and water, re-establish electricity, water, and make sure supplies were provided.

In his second six months deployed, Krey served on striker platoon, a quick reaction platoon that searched for the presence of high-value Iraqi targets in Al Anbar Province.

Krey spent six months flying on Blackhawk helicopters, to help confirm or deny the presence of high value targets to the U.S. Those targets were identified on the “deck of 52,” a deck of playing cards reproduced with a list of people that U.S. forces were searching for, and distributed to soldiers. Krey still has a copy of the deck, printed on paper backed with camouflage.

Krey said that he spent nearly every day on a helicopter, vibrating constantly, waiting for something to go wrong. There were times his unit had to jump up at 2 a.m. to follow a possible target.

Krey left the military in 2004, and lives in McFarland with his wife and family.

Nick krey 1.JPG

He now works as a financial advisor, and is a member of the McFarland American Legion Post.

Krey said that even though his military service has ended, he continues to seek opportunities to serve his community, through volunteering and his career, devoting his “time, talent and intellectual capacity.”



He said he hopes his career in financial planning will help community members develop financial literacy skills, especially to support previously marginalized communities.

“Having served my country, I believe in service to my community as well. And everybody has the capacity whether it’s picking up trash with a nonprofit organization or providing financial literacy...the conversations from experienced, qualified people is a service to your community,” Krey said.

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