

ARCTIC WARRIOR

JOINT BASE ELMENDORF-RICHARDSON'S SOURCE FOR NEWS

GET ON YOUR

**BIKES
AND
RIDE**

*Well... not yet,
but soon*

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It's almost time: Motorcycle season

By **AIRMAN 1ST CLASS JONATHAN VALDES**
JBER Public Affairs

The time of year many two-wheeled travelers look forward to is quickly approaching – warm weather and clear roads mean ideal riding conditions.

The motorcycle season runs from May to October, and begins when the 673d Mission Support Group commander declares the road condition green – and after the roads have been cleared of dangerous accumulations of gravel.

Road condition green is when roads are clear of snow and ice and are dry. Drivers will comply with normal vehicle operating procedures and posted speed limits.

Knowing the steps to prepare before motorcycle season starts is key for all riders.

“Riders need to satisfy program requirements to drive a motorcycle,” said David Spellman, 673d Air Base Wing Safety Office occupational safety specialist and motorcycle safety program manager for Joint Base Elmendorf-Richardson. “Compliance with personal protective equipment guidelines is also required.”

For all those who plan to ride their motorcycles, the JBER Motorcycle Pre-season/Annual Safety Briefing is scheduled for April 23 at the Frontier Theater.

The first briefing will be presented at 7 a.m., the second one at 10 a.m., and the last one at 5 p.m.

The Joint Base Elmendorf-Richardson Motorcycle Safety Program is governed



A motorcyclist drives between cones during a pre-ride skills assessment at Joint Base Elmendorf-Richardson. At JBER, the riding season typically runs from May to October and motorcycle operations are only allowed when road conditions are green. (U.S. Air Force photo/Senior Airman Kyle Johnson)

by Department of Defense Instruction 6055.04, DoD Traffic Safety Program; Air Force Instruction 91-207, The U.S. Air Force Traffic Safety Program; Joint Base Elmendorf-Richardson Instruction 91-202, Safety Standards for the JBER Mishap Prevention Program; JBER Instruction 31-118, Motor Vehicle Traffic Supervision Program and Army Regulation 385-10, The Army Safety Program.

These documents call for the following safety practices for motorcyclists:

- All motorcyclists' headlights must be on at all times when operating on a DoD installation, whether on or off-road.
- Riders must properly wear a helmet, fastened un-

der the chin and certified to meet current federal motor vehicle safety standards.

- Riders must properly wear goggles, wrap-around glasses or a full-face shield designed to meet or exceed American National Standards Institute standards.

- Riders must wear a long-sleeved shirt or jacket, long trousers and full-fingered gloves or mittens.

- Gloves or mittens must be made from leather or other abrasion-resistant material.

- Riders must wear sturdy over-the-ankle foot protection that affords protection for the feet and ankles.

Both Air Force and Army regulations mandate motorcycle riders receive Motorcycle Safety Foundation training before they are able

to ride on base.

Army personnel are required to have refresher training every three years, and Air Force every five years.

Army personnel can acquire the 2019 JBER Motorcycle Training Request form from the U.S. Army Alaska Mission Safety Office and their unit motorcycle monitor.


Air Force personnel can acquire the form from their motorcycle safety representative or the JBER Occupational Safety SharePoint.

Any military member regardless of branch can acquire the training request forms on JBER's website at www.jber.jb.mil.

Completed and signed forms can be emailed to 673abw.seg@us.af.mil.

“Service members need to identify their intent to ride to their supervisor and unit motorcycle safety representative,” Spellman said. “After that, the motorcycle safety representative will provide an initial safety brief. If the service member is an existing rider, they will get a pre-season brief and from there the safety representative will verify if their training is current.

“If it's not, they will help facilitate the process to set them up for training.”

For more information about motorcycling on JBER and road conditions, contact the JBER Safety Office at 552-6850 or email 673abw.seg@us.af.mil, visit the JBER website or call 552-INFO (4636). 

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ARCTIC WARRIOR

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INTERIOR DESIGNS:

Spartans train at Fort Greely



Mortarmen with the 4th Infantry Brigade Combat Team (Airborne), 25th Infantry Division, U.S. Army Alaska, prepare to fire their 120mm mortar system during live-fire training exercises March 21 at Fort Greely as Mount Hayes looms in the background. (U.S. Army photo/Sgt. Alex Skripnichuk)

POLAR FORCE



Airmen load cargo onto a C-17 Globemaster III during Polar Force 19-4 at Joint Base Elmendorf-Richardson March 25. Polar Force is a two-week exercise designed to test JBER's mission readiness, and develops the skills service members require to face adverse situations. (U.S. Air Force photo/Airman 1st Class Jonathan Valdes Montijo)

Senior Airman Charlotte Gainvors, 673d Security Forces Squadron armorer, issues an M-4 carbine to a security forces augmentee during a shift change during Polar Force 19-4 at Joint Base Elmendorf-Richardson March 26. (U.S. Air Force photo/Airman 1st Class Crystal Jenkins)



QUARTERLY EXERCISE IS GO



Service members participate in a Mission Assurance Exercise at Joint Base Elmendorf-Richardson March 21. The exercise tested the installation’s capabilities to respond to a simulated biological attack. (U.S. Air Force photo/Airman 1st Class Adriana Barrientos)



Airmen assigned to the 673d Logistics Readiness Squadron receive individual protective equipment for a simulated deployment during Polar Force 19-4 at Joint Base Elmendorf-Richardson March 25. Polar Force is a two-week exercise designed to test JBER’s mission readiness. Exercises like this strengthen and develop the skills service members require when facing adverse situations. (U.S. Air Force photo/Airman 1st Class Crystal Jenkins)



Airmen load cargo onto a C-17 Globemaster III during Polar Force 19-4 at Joint Base Elmendorf-Richardson, Alaska, March 25, 2019. Polar Force is a two-week exercise designed to test JBER’s mission readiness, and develops the skills service members require to face adverse situations. (U.S. Air Force photo/Airman 1st Class Jonathan Valdes Montijo)
ABOVE LEFT: Airmen carry their bags of gear onto a waiting bus, part of a simulated deployment during Polar Force, a quarterly readiness exercise. (U.S. Air Force photo/Airman 1st Class Crystal Jenkins)
LEFT: Tech. Sgt. Kimberly Johnson and Airman 1st Class Carla Gonzalez, assigned to the 673d Logistics Readiness Squadron, issue individual protective equipment to Air Force Staff Sgt. Arroyo Gutierrez for a simulated deployment during Polar Force 19-4 at Joint Base Elmendorf-Richardson March 25. Polar Force is a two-week exercise designed to test JBER’s mission readiness. Exercises like this strengthen and develop the skills service members require when facing adverse situations. (U.S. Air Force photo/Airman 1st Class Crystal Jenkins)
ON THE COVER: Aircraft perform an “Elephant walk” on the JBER flightline March 26 before taking off during a simulated deployment.

Friday

Lunch with a vendor

Head to Information, Tickets and Travel in the Arctic Oasis from 11 a.m. to noon and save big on Alaska cruises. Specials run all day. For information, call 552-0297 or 753-2378.

ASL class

Join the Library for this class which teaches elementary school-aged children the basics of sign language from 2 to 3 p.m. It's an excellent opportunity for home schoolers. For information, call 384-1640.

Saturday

Mushrooms of spring

Spring's on its way – learn about the morel, including how to tell real from false morels and where to find them. The class is free at the Eagle River Nature Center at 2 p.m.

For more information, visit ernc.org.

Earth Hour at the Zoo

Join the Alaska Zoo and millions around the world in Earth Hour. Bring a beeswax or soy candle and enjoy a candlelit walk through the zoo. For information, visit alaskazoo.org and earthhour.org.

April 13

Ping Pong tournamnet

Show off your skills and crush the competition at the Warrior Zone starting at 2 p.m. with this tournament with prizes for the top three finishers. For information, call 384-9006.

April 13 and 14

Alyeska Slush Cup

Even Alyeska's season must come to an end. Check

out the spring carnival with long lift operations, great conditions, and the slush cup – skimming a 90-foot pond in a zany costume. For information, visit alyeskaresort.com.

April 17

Ladies' night at the range

Women of all skill levels can head to the Skeet and Trap range for this introduction to shotguns, safety and shooting from 5:30 to 7:30 p.m. For information, call 384-1480.

April 19

Teens' Easter egg hunt

The JBER youth centers invite teens to search in the dark for prize-filled eggs starting at 9:30 p.m. Bring a flashlight and a basket. For information, call 384-1508 or 552-2266.

April 20

Easter Bunny ice cream

Tickets go on sale April 1 for this event featuring ice cream, crafts, and much more with the Easter Bunny from 11 a.m. to noon. For information, call 552-8529.

Paws to Read

The JBER Library invites children in kindergarten through 5th grade to read to a service dog from 10 a.m. to noon. For information, call 384-1640.

Ongoing

Glide Fit

Try a new way to get in shape with this class at the Buckner Physical Fitness Center pool Saturdays from 9:30 to 10:30 a.m. or Wednesdays from 5:30 to 6:30 p.m. Test your balance while working out on a stand-up paddleboard. Open to ages 13 and older.

For more information, call 384-1301.

Night at the Fights

The Egan Center hosts Thursday night boxing and mixed martial arts fights at 7:30 p.m. For more, visit thursdaynightfights.com.

Evening hikes

Alaska Outdoors hosts weekly hikes Monday and Thursday evenings from 6:30 to 8 p.m. Monday hikes are easy, 3.5 to 4.5 miles and perfect for beginners or families with kids.

Thursday hikes are moderate difficulty.

For information, visit alaska-outdoors.org.

Civil Air Patrol

Adult members of the Civil Air Patrol meet at the Aero Club Hangar the first and third Tuesdays of each month; cadets meet Saturdays. For more information or to join, call 350-7951.

Thursday science club

Youth are invited to the JBER Library to experiment and think about science from 6:30 to 7 p.m. For information, call 384-1640.

Library story times

The JBER Library hosts preschool story times Tuesdays and Thursdays from 10 to 11 a.m.; Toddler Tales Wednesdays from 10 to 10:30 a.m., and all-ages story time Tuesdays from 6:30 to 7 p.m. For more information, call 384-1640.

Model railroading

The Military Society of Model Railroad Engineers meets at 7 p.m. Tuesdays and 1 p.m. Saturdays in the basement of Matanuska Hall. They host an open house every third Saturday through April.

For more information, call 552-5234, e-mail msmrre@gmail.com or visit facebook.com/msmrre.

Chapel services

Catholic Mass

Sunday
9 a.m. – Arctic Warrior Chapel
Monday and Wednesday
11:40 a.m. – Arctic Warrior Chapel
Tuesday
Noon – JBER Hospital Chapel
Friday
Noon – JBER Hospital Chapel

Confession

Confessions are available anytime by appointment or after any mass. Call 552-5762.

Protestant Sunday worship services

Gospel
9:30 a.m. – Midnight Sun Chapel
Contemporary
11 a.m. – Arctic Warrior Chapel
Traditional
11 a.m. – Heritage Chapel

Religious Education

For schedules, call the Religious Operations Center at 552-5762.

March of the elephants



Dozens of aircraft taxi along the runways at Joint Base Elmendorf-Richardson March 26 in an "Elephant walk" conducted as part of exercise Polar Force. The aircraft taxied, took off, and landed as part of a simulated deployment to an overseas location, lending realism to the exercise. (U.S. Air Force photo/Airman 1st Class Jonathan Valdes)

Reinvigorating resolutions, making progress

By **ARMY CHAPLAIN (CAPT.) BRIAN S. PHIPPS**
725th BSB Chaplain

A few months ago, many of you set a New Year’s resolution which involved going to the gym, losing weight, getting in shape or becoming a better person.

Each year we do this, and most of the time these goals only last a few weeks. This doesn’t mean we weren’t serious about our goals when we started. Perhaps we went to the store and bought new workout clothes, new shoes, new wireless headphones, and some new type of lo-cal snacks. Maybe we even paid for a gym membership.

We started January with high hopes and big dreams. The reality for many of us is this goal lasted until about February 15 and then we got tired or busy. We no longer had time to go to the gym. We found all kinds of excuses of why we couldn’t get up early. Suddenly it’s the end of March, and maybe we have not been to the gym in nearly a month.

In 2015, I set out to run my first

half-marathon.

I thought, “This shouldn’t be too bad as it is only 13.1 miles and I can ruck 12 miles with no problem.”

I’m not sure about you, but I’m not the person that wakes up in the morning saying “I cannot wait to run 6 or 9 miles today.” I’m more along the lines of “God, are you sure that I should be doing this?”

In preparing for this half-marathon, I didn’t wake up and just run thirteen miles; it was a process over several months of training my body to be able to run that far.

Each day as I set out on the two-, four-, six-, eight-, or ten-mile run, I had a lot of time to think.

After mile two or three, I begin to try to convince myself I have run far enough. The conversation would go something like this: “OK. Yesterday you ran six miles, so today you should take it easy. You can run a little slower or even stop for today, because you don’t want to overdo it.”

It is easy to talk ourselves out of our goals, so during this time, when the training gets hard, we need people to support us and encourage us.

When I was training, I was not running alone. I met up with a group of people who would help push me to meet my goal.

This does not mean I was always happy about how far or fast we were running, but they were always there to encourage me.

In many ways, training for this race increased my prayer life.

On long run days, my prayers would start with: “Lord, please help each of us to complete today’s run and give each of us the strength we need.”

By mile four, it would change to: “Lord, please help me to finish this run.”

By mile six my prayer life turned to: “Lord, I would be happy if you came and raptured all of us right now.” By mile eight: “Lord, don’t worry about anyone else right now; just take me home.”

When it came to race day I was very nervous and anxious. I had been training for months and it was game day.

When the gun fired, we all began to run.

After two hours – and a lot of prayer – I saw the finish line in sight.

Suddenly, I got a burst of energy. People were cheering all around me, and finally I crossed the finish line.


As my friends and family met me, I was filled with joy knowing that just four months before, I’d never run more than three miles, and now I’d finished a half-marathon.

The reason that I stuck to my goal was the people around me encouraging me and pushing. They did not let me give up or quit.

So, what does this mean for you? Maybe today is the day you reinvigorate pursuing the goal you set in January.

Maybe today you seek the encouragement and help of a caring friend or two to get started again.

With their encouragement and accountability, you might surprise yourself in future weeks with the progress you’ve made.

We always have excuses as to why we can’t finish our goals, but I can assure you if you stick with it, the joy you will feel when you reach the finish line is awesome. 

Hospital Family Day hours

The 673d Medical Group is open on Pacific Air Forces family days to ensure patients have access to acute care and several other services. Specialty care, surgical services, the laboratory, pharmacy and radiology will be open on a limited basis. For information, call 580-2778.

Firewood permits

Firewood is \$35 per cord or \$17.50 per half-cord. To receive a permit, an iSportsman permit is required. For information, visit <https://jber.isportsman.net>.

Main Pharmacy hours

The main JBER pharmacy, on the first floor of the JBER hospital, is open from 7:30 a.m. to 4:30 p.m. The pharmacy at the Exchange is open 9 a.m. to 6 p.m. Mondays through Fridays for civilian prescriptions and refills, and Saturdays from 9 a.m. to 1 p.m. for refills only.

iSportsman enrollment

Anyone choosing to rec-

reate in JBER training areas must obtain an iSportsman permit and sign in and out using the iSportsman system prior to recreating. A pass costs \$10; \$5 for those 60 and older and disabled persons. Passholders may also need an installation access pass. For information, visit [isportsman.jber.net](https://jber.isportsman.net) or call 552-8609 or 384-6224.

Reserve ‘Scroll’

Officers wanting to transition to the Air Force Reserve must have their commission transferred to a list called “the Scroll” and approved by the Secretary of Defense.

The process averages 120 days, but can take longer, and must be approved before participating in the Reserve, which may mean a break in service. Even if you’re unsure about transitioning to the Air Force Reserve, the process can be initiated. For information, call 552-3595.

Pothole repair

The 773d Civil Engineer Squadron encourages all

Joint Base Elmendorf-Richardson personnel to report potholes. For holes in housing areas, contact Aurora Housing at 753-1051. Other requests are tracked by 773d CES. Note the location, including cross-streets or building numbers. Then email 773ces.ceoh.potholerepair@us.af.mil or call 552-2994 or 552-2995. Include contact information for crews.

U-Fix-It Store

The U-Fix-It stores, open to all Aurora Military Housing tenants, issue home maintenance items. Availability is subject to change and limits; some items may have a cost. The JBER-E location, at 6350 Arctic Warrior Drive, is open 8:30 a.m. to 5 p.m., Tuesday through Friday, closed from 1 to 1:30 p.m. for lunch, and Saturday, 9 a.m. to noon and 1 to 4 p.m.

The JBER-R office is at 338 Hoonah Ave., open from 8:30 a.m. to 5 p.m., Monday through Friday, and closed from 1 to 1:30 p.m. A blind-cleaning machine is

available at the JBER-E location; priority goes to those PCSing. For information, call 375-5540.

DLA Document Services

Defense Logistics Agency Document Services duplicates and prints documents, including color, large-format photos, engineering drawings, sensitive materials, manuals and training materials. They design, print and distribute business cards, letterhead, invitations and programs, and provide devices to print, scan, copy and fax, and provides maintenance and ink cartridges. They offer document automation and content services for building digital libraries. To register, go to <https://www.dso.documentservices.dla.mil>. For information, visit [document-services.dla.mil](https://documentservices.dla.mil) or call (808) 473-1699 or (315) 473-1699.

OTC pharmacy counter

The pharmacy at the JBER hospital has over-the-counter medication for DoD beneficiaries from 7:30 to

10:30 a.m., Monday through Friday. Flyers and those on personnel reliability program status, pregnant, or under the age of 2 are not eligible.

The clinic offers pain relievers; cough, cold and allergy medications; ointments; constipation and diarrhea medications, and others.

For information, visit JBERPharmacy on Facebook.

ASYMCA Bargain shop

The ASYMCA Bargain Shop, 8515 Saville Ave. on JBER-E, is open Tuesdays, Wednesdays and Fridays from 10 a.m. to 2 p.m. and the first Saturday of the month from 10 a.m. to 2 p.m. For information, call 753-6134.

Richardson Thrift Shop

The JBER-Richardson Thrift Shop, Building 724 Quartermaster Drive, is open Tuesday and Thursday from 10 a.m. to 2 p.m., Wednesday from noon to 6 p.m., and first and third Saturdays from 11 a.m. to 2 p.m. For information, call 384-7000.

Wildlife is waking up, hungry; use caution

By **AIR FORCE STAFF SGT. WESTIN WARBURTON**
JBER Public Affairs

Spring is here and so is the wildlife. It's time to be bear aware, and mindful of moose.

Bear sightings have already been reported on Joint Base Elmendorf-Richardson. This means it's time to clean up yards and bring in the trash.

"Our biggest problem is garbage," said Mark Sledge, 673d Civil Engineering Squadron senior conservation law enforcement officer. "We've seen trash in truck beds, dumpsters that aren't being closed all the way, and there have been a few incidents of people dumping grease over the back of their fences."

By keeping trash bins in garages until pickup day, and doing the obvious clean-up, neighborhoods will be safer as bears will have no reason to intrude.

"If you see a bear in your

trash or in a neighbor's, call security forces," added Sledge. "They will notify us immediately, day or night, and we will come out and take care of the situation with hazing."

Along with trash, bird feeders are an issue.

Bears are attracted to suet and oily sunflower seeds often found in Alaska bird feeders. Feeders need to be brought inside from April to October.

Bears also love the smell of cooked food left over on grills; give yours a scrub.

While bears are a big concern, the JBER community also needs to be mindful of the moose calving season that will start within the next few weeks.

"We consider calving season to be the most hazardous time," said Jim Wendland, 673d CES chief conservation law enforcement officer. "In years past, we have had kids get hit by moose protecting their young. It's the



A moose walks toward the Yukla Hall dormitories on Joint Base Elmendorf Richardson, Feb. 22, 2016. According to the conservation law enforcement agents on base, nuisance wildlife calls increase in the spring as animals forage for scarce food. (U.S. Air Force photo by Airman 1st Class Javier Alvarez)

worst time to have your kids cut through the woods to get to school or any other place they might be going."

The first month after birth is when the cow is most protective.


You just have to be mindful and learn to live with

them, added Sledge.

In addition to bears and moose, wolves and coyotes have been known to live on base. Leaving pets in back yards unattended may result in an attack or even worse.

"It's up to you to protect your pets," said Sledge. "Tak-

ing the necessary precautions will help keep your family and neighborhood safe from the Alaska wildlife."

For more information about living with wildlife, visit the Alaska Department of Fish and Game's website at www.adfg.alaska.gov. 

Original Rosie the Riveter visits Pentagon

By **AIR FORCE MASTER SGT. AMAANI LYLE**
SECAF Public Affairs

ARLINGTON, Va. — When it comes to symbolizing the influx of women in the workforce and the wave of patriotism and feminism during World War II, few American icons are more recognizable than “Rosie the Riveter.”

Artist J. Howard Miller’s 1942 poster, featuring a bandannaed, blue-collared woman with the famed flex beneath the rally cry, “We Can Do It!” grew to represent millions of women who stepped up to fill stateside jobs once held by men.

The notable efforts of the woman workforce that led to the eventual U.S. victory in 1945 inspired one of the last remaining original “Rosies,” Mae Krier, to carry their story to the Pentagon March 20 to advocate for long overdue recognition on Capitol Hill March 21, with a “Rosie the Riveter Day of Remembrance,” incidentally aligning with her 93rd

birthday. She said she hopes lawmakers will not only recognize the day, but award them the Congressional Gold Medal for their service.

After all, the story of her journey is, fittingly, a riveting one, decades in the making.

The world changed on Dec. 7, 1941, as 183 Japanese warplanes attacked Hickam Field, Pearl Harbor, Hawaii.

Krier recalled coming home to find her parents huddled next to the radio as the news spread; days later, Adolf Hitler declared war on the United States.

“We were fighting wars across two oceans and I remember thinking ‘I’m not even sure I know where Pearl Harbor is; I don’t think many of us did,’” she said. “In small towns the boys enlisted right away ... and America was full of holes, because so many never came back.”

On a lark, Krier, a Dawson, North Dakota, native, traveled by a no-frills “troop train” to Seattle to produce the B-17 Flying Fortress and B-29 Superfortress bombers during the war.

“Now that the boys had left, we girls thought we would get into the act also,” she said of the adventure she, her sister and a friend took.

“Before the jobs came, we struggled, we suffered, everyone did,” she said of the Great Depression years. “But that was life – and I don’t think it hurt me.”

Once at Boeing, Krier said she had no idea how much larger-than-life the Rosie icon would become. “We worked because we had a job to do ... it wasn’t my job, your job, it was our job – we had to save our country.”

And, she noted, it was only after the war the posters skyrocketed in popularity.

Dawn Goldfein, spouse to Air Force Chief of Staff Gen. David L. Goldfein, hosted the Pentagon tour with Krier, noting her story can inspire a “We Can Do It!” attitude among new generations of young women.

“Mae is an American treasure, a true iconic legacy who knows what it means to be a part of something bigger than herself and give back,” Mrs.



Ms. Gwendolyn DeFilippi (left) the Assistant Deputy Chief of Staff for Manpower, Personal and Services, Headquarters U.S. Air Force, speaks with Mae Krier, an original Rosie the Riveter during a visit to the Pentagon March 20. (U.S. Air Force photo/Adrian Cadiz)


Goldfein said. “Girls and women of all ages can benefit from her extraordinary story and be inspired to change the world as she and all the Rosies did.”

Today, military and civilian women hold positions of power across the globe.

“It’s so amazing for our generation to see this because my mother only got the right to vote when I was about 4 years old,” Krier said. “I’ve lived through 16 presidents but never thought I’d get to

see and experience the things I have today.”

Krier, who was married to her husband Norm for nearly 70 years before his death, is a mother, grandmother and great-great grandmother. They met during a jitterbug dance in Seattle in 1944 and wed in 1945.

When dozens of Pentagon workers surprised her with a visit and a birthday cake, Krier wasted no time. “They never lost a B-17 because of a bad rivet,” Krier said. 

Soldier killed in Iraq to receive Medal of Honor

By **DAVID VERGUN**
Army News Service

BOZEMAN, Mont. — Yusufiyah wasn't the safest place to be. The Iraqi town southwest of Baghdad was in an area U.S. Soldiers called the "Triangle of Death" because so many had been killed there in the years following the 2003 invasion.

On a hot and muggy morning June 1, 2007, Staff Sgt. Travis Atkins, 31, and fellow Soldiers were searching for a missing or captured Soldier in the vicinity of Yusufiyah.

They'd been attacked earlier in the day. Now they noticed four suspicious-looking characters.

As the truck commander in his Humvee, Atkins ordered the driver to pull the vehicle up to the intersection so they could interdict the suspected insurgents. Atkins approached one of the men to check him for weapons while another Soldier covered him.

Travis understood the danger, said his father John "Jack" Atkins. But as a leader, Travis lived and breathed Army values.

Jack wasn't just saying that; he had been a paratrooper in Vietnam from 1965 to 1966, so he well understood the dangers his son faced and the Warrior Ethos that Army professionals live by.

Travis always wanted to be a Soldier, his father remembered, speaking from the Montana farm house where Travis had lived since age 6.

After high school, Travis did an assortment of blue-collar work, from painting and concrete work to jobs as a small-engine mechanic in the Montana towns of Belgrade, Bozeman and West Yellowstone. He also spent a year at Kemper Military School in Booneville, Missouri.

Decision to enlist

One day, at age 25, Travis realized he wasn't getting any younger and he'd have to make a decision about joining the Army, his father related, so he went to see the local recruiter.

After taking the Armed Services Vocational Aptitude Battery, which measures aptitude for the various military occupational specialties, a recruiter informed Travis that he scored high in mechanical aptitude and the Army thought he'd make a great helicopter mechanic, Jack said.

Travis was in fact very skilled with his hands, his father said. As a boy, he quickly learned to operate all of the farm vehicles.

Travis was, however, dead set on

becoming an infantryman and told the recruiter in so many words that if he didn't get infantry, he wouldn't enlist. He got his wish, his father said.

Following his enlistment in 2000, Travis completed infantry initial-entry training at Fort Benning, Georgia.

His parents, Jack and Elaine, attended the graduation ceremony. When it was over, Travis told his parents that going through basic combat training was the most fun he'd ever had, Elaine said.

"I don't think too many Soldiers would have told you that," Jack said. But he loved it. He loved the discipline and the physical and mental challenges and most of all, he loved to shoot."

Air Assault

Following infantry training at Benning, Travis was assigned to Alpha Company, 3rd Battalion, 327th Infantry Regiment, 1st Brigade, 101st Airborne Division (Air Assault) at Fort Campbell, Kentucky.

Jack said he didn't know if his own service from 1963 to 1967 as a paratrooper and as a co-pilot on a number of fixed-wing and helicopter models had anything to do with Travis' wish to become a Soldier.

"I never encouraged him or discouraged him from serving," he said. "It would have to be his decision and his alone to make."

At the time, the nation was not at war. But a year later that would change, following the 9/11 terrorist attacks. Travis steeled himself for the fight he certainly knew he'd soon be in, Jack said.

First Iraq deployment

Travis deployed with the 101st to Kuwait in early March 2003 and participated in the invasion of Iraq as a fire team leader and later as a squad leader.

In less than three years' time, Travis made sergeant. Jack said it was because he was very competitive and competent and had all the markings of an outstanding leader.

He wanted to join the 501st Parachute Infantry Regiment in Alaska after returning from Iraq, but he was told no slots were available, his father said. So he decided to get out.

In December 2003, he was discharged and returned to Montana to continue the blue-collar jobs he'd previously done and to attend the University of Montana in Missoula. But he soon began to miss the challenges of military life, his father said.

"I told him he'd paid his dues with the 101st in Iraq, but he wanted to go back in. That's where he felt comfortable," Jack said. "Since he insisted on going back in, I suggested he change his MOS to something he could use when he got out, but he insisted on infantry only.

"The military isn't suitable for everyone, but it was his niche. He belonged," Jack added.

So, in December 2005, he re-enlisted and the Army let him keep his former E-5 rank.

He was assigned to Alpha Co., 2nd Bn., 14th Inf. Reg., 2nd Brigade Combat Team, 10th Mountain Div. (Light Infantry), at Fort Drum, New York.

Travis thrived, Jack said. He focused on keeping his young Soldiers well trained.

"Some of them later came to me and said that he was really hard on them and they didn't like it," he said. "But over time, they said they came to appreciate what he did and that hard training in some cases saved their lives."

Travis knew another deployment to Iraq or possibly Afghanistan was inevitable, Jack said.

Second Iraq deployment

Travis was subsequently re-assigned to Delta Company in the same battalion and got orders to Iraq again in August 2006.

"I'm not too sure I can make this one," Jack said his son told him. "Travis knew the reality of serving in Iraq. He knew there'd be danger."

Jack and Elaine attended the big deployment ceremony at Fort Drum. "As I looked out over the formation from the viewing stand, I realized that some of them were not coming back," Elaine said. "But you hope for the best."

Similar to his previous deployment, Travis displayed great leadership qualities, this time as a squad leader, Jack said. "His world revolved around his troops, whom he called 'my Joes.'"

When his platoon sergeant went on leave stateside, Travis was elevated to that position and promoted to staff sergeant on May 1, 2007.

On the morning of June 1, hours before he would be going on that search mission, Travis called home, Elaine said.

"He asked me if I'd received the Mother's Day card he mailed," Elaine said.

"No I didn't, I told him."

He then became very apologetic, she said.

Elaine told her son not to worry and to just focus on his mission. She was sure the card would eventually arrive.

The engagement

When Atkins attempted to search the suspect, the man resisted. Atkins then engaged in hand-to-hand combat with the insurgent, who was reaching for an explosive vest under his clothing, according to an award citation.

Atkins then grabbed the suicide bomber from behind with a bear hug and slammed him onto the ground, away from his Soldiers. As he pinned the insurgent to the ground, the bomb detonated.

Atkins was mortally wounded by the blast. With complete disregard for his own safety, he had used his own body as a shield to protect his three fellow Soldiers from injury. They were only feet away.

Soon after, another insurgent was fatally shot by one of Atkins' Soldiers before he could injure anyone.

Leader perspectives

Owen Meehan, the company first sergeant, said he spoke with Atkins 30 minutes before. They conversed about route security and the placement of the gun trucks in his sector.

The highway they were clearing was known as Route Caprice, a supply route that connected Camp Stryker with other forward operating bases in the vicinity of Baghdad.

Meehan said he was visiting the platoon sergeant of another sector when he heard the explosion. He said he immediately went there.

"His platoon was devastated," he said.

"His men loved him," he added. "He was a damn good NCO and he really, really took care of his men. He was one of the good ones."

Meehan admitted that he "was a little bit of a rough and tough first sergeant," and gave praise sparingly, meaning that he thought Atkins was exceptionally good.

Atkins' company commander, Alex Ruschell, said "he was a phenomenal NCO and monumentally inspiring."

Ruschell, now a major working in the Pentagon, had been with a mechanized unit just prior to the Iraq deployment and Atkins, along with the first sergeant and other NCOs, helped him transition to light infantry.

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At least several times a month, Ruschell said he thinks about Atkins and his sacrifice. Later, he said he met Trevor Oliver, Atkins' son, and he keeps a picture on his dresser of Delta Company's 2nd Platoon, with Trevor up in front of the guys. He said his own son is about the same age as Trevor.

Former Capt. Clint Langreck, Atkins' company executive officer, recalls him as being "the real deal. He certainly was mature in the way he handled himself and the way he handled troops. I don't remember a day when he wasn't positive or professional. And he always had a military bearing."

In one engagement during a route patrol, Atkins' Humvee, which Langreck thinks was the lead vehicle, hit a mine, blowing the whole front end skyward – fortunately not injuring anyone, but destroying the vehicle.

After the explosion and

the emotional event, Atkins "had the sound mind to immediately assign sectors and put in security."

In another incident, the company was patrolling through a small village when gunfire erupted.

"I remember him doing all the right things," Langreck said.

"It turned out to be just some locals probably hunting birds," he said. Atkins' "guys were all postured and ready to shoot and he de-escalated the situation and took care of it all," meaning no Soldiers fired weapons.

After the patrol, Atkins sat down with his men and did an after-action review. "That was the exact right thing to do," he said. "You talk about the situation and learn from it. It left an impression on me watching that."

Command Sgt. Maj. Roberto Guadarrama, Atkins' platoon sergeant then, had served with him during the deployment and for many months before and got to

know him.

"We shared a lot of time together," he said. "He was very passionate with the stories he would share."

Atkins was also "a great team builder, very competitive, a great person to be around. What a complement he was to the outfit," Guadarrama said.

He was decisive and fluid in his leadership in critical combat situations where most people would falter, Guadarrama added. And, his decisions and actions were always correct. "I can't speak for everyone," he said, "but I know that the day he was killed, I think a good part was killed inside everybody."

Notification, aftermath

On June 1, 2007, a sergeant first class in uniform and an Army chaplain in civilian clothes arrived at the Atkins home in Bozeman to inform the parents that their son had been killed.

Trevor, who was 11 at the time, said, "It was five days

after my birthday," mentioning that his dad had called to wish him a happy birthday.

His father's death was hard on him – and still is, he said, particularly around the holidays.

Trevor, who is now 22, recalled Thanksgivings when his dad would peel the skin of the turkey as that was his favorite part. He also fondly recalled their camping, hunting, fishing and snowmobiling trips with his dad and grandparents.

Soldiers from Travis' unit were very supportive, Trevor said. They invited him and his grandparents to Fort Drum, where Trevor said he got to do some cool stuff like driving a Humvee through the forest.

That helped to ease the pain somewhat, he said.

Another thing that helped was getting a call from President Donald J. Trump recently, informing him that his father would be receiving the Medal of Honor. Trump was very cordial and upbeat,

Trevor recounted, adding that he complimented him on having good genes from a tough warrior. "That meant a lot to me," Trevor said.

There were other things that eased the pain somewhat, he recalled.

Buddies who had served with Atkins told Trevor how much his father had inspired them and kept them alive through rigorous training. "They treated me so good. That was very, very sweet of them," Trevor said.

One day while fishing, his father had told Trevor to observe the water flowing over the rocks and boulders. See how the water is moving and flowing past the obstacles, he pointed out, telling his son that's what he needs to do. Keep moving past the obstacles no matter what.

Atkins was the "best father a son could hope to have," Trevor said. "He was also the best Soldier and leader. I wish I'll be half the man he was and hope to do him proud." 