

Veteranspotlight

By Heather Gordon

Meet Rorik “Wallace” Larson, this month’s *West Orland Life* spotlight veteran



Rorik “Wallace” Larson dreamed of being a helicopter pilot ever since he was a young boy. Unlike most children who become distracted and bounce from one interest to the next, Wallace focused on his passion, planned for it, and made it happen. He chose a college with a Reserve Officers’ Training Corps program and aviation major. He competed for and won a 4-year ROTC scholarship and was eventually accepted to military flight school.

As an officer in the United States Army, Wallace performed many important roles during his 22 years of service. He realized his dream of piloting a military helicopter. He was promoted to a leadership position in charge of aviation maintenance and logistics. He was also a flight instructor.

Wallace explained that hovering a helicopter is more difficult than it may seem. A car moves forward and back, but a helicopter moves sideways as well. It takes both hands and both feet to maneuver, and just a fraction of a movement can send the craft too far in one direction. To be able to do this takes skill, and to be able to teach it takes all that and more, which is why one of Wallace’s proudest moments of his military career was watching his students successfully hover a helicopter.

Much of Wallace’s impact was made overseas. He was based in Germany a total of 10 years, served in Korea and Bosnia, and was deployed to Iraq twice.

The atmosphere in Bosnia was more benign than in Iraq, and Wallace’s work there was successful as part of a classified mission that made a difference.

During the Iraq invasion, he supported and followed troops in order to maintain their aircraft during combat and ran a functional warehouse. The Kuwait installation was at the nerve center of the American Military in Iraq. Although Patriot missile launches could be heard hitting the targets and exploding and air raid sirens would go off, there was a sense of feeling safe, being under an umbrella of protection. Ironically, for being as close to the action as they were, Wallace and his troops would wait and watch CNN to see what happened.

Wallace’s memories of his assignments in Iraq also involve incoming fire on the bases. This time that sense of a safety umbrella wasn’t there. He distinctly remembers at night in particular, as he lay in his tent, he could feel the concussion of the rocket fire as it shook the air. He likened it to the loud, power-

JULY West Orland Life



ful fireworks in a 4th of July display. The fear he experienced at night wasn’t so much for himself as for his wife; what she would be going through not knowing how he was.

Part of Wallace’s responsibilities on his second tour entailed proofreading condolence letters. This meant not just proofing text but making sure the appropriate people were given the right message. In addition, he proofread awards for heroism.

Wallace’s personal take on heroism is that there are different types of heroes. Sometimes as a function of their jobs people have the opportunity to be heroic under extraordinary circumstances. Others are heroes under ordinary circumstances, people who are doing the right thing just because it is right. There is a genuineness about them – the unsung, everyday heroes. In both instances, heroes never consider themselves heroes. They are humble and only acknowledge that they did the best they could do in the given situation.

He feels grateful to be a part of this generation of Military Service where all of our servicemen and women are appreciated, unlike the Vietnam Veterans. We have respect for soldiers. And just as important, there is understanding and support for

NeighborhoodNews | 31



their families. Military families endure an incredible amount of stress.

Wallace retired from the Army as a Lieutenant Colonel in 2009. He and his wife, Laura, and his son, Ryan, moved from Germany back to the United States. They chose to settle down in Laura’s hometown of Orland Park.

Wallace started his own financial planning and tax preparation business. He brings a unique perspective to his clients because he has walked the road of retirement at an early age and he understands that many decisions can be emotional not just financial, especially during this time of economic uncertainty.

He and Laura are fitness enthusiasts, active in their church, and busy raising their son. They try to expose Ryan to as many opportunities as possible and enjoy watching him experience new things. Sometimes Wallace will take him to an Air Show or to the Bolingbrook Airport to watch the planes take off and land. And while Ryan’s bedroom has a helicopter motif, Wallace does not expect his son to take the same path. Unless he wants to. The best thing he could do is follow his own passion.

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