

MHS SUPERHEROES

LT. COL. MATTHEW D. WELDER



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National Nurses Week



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I knew I wanted to be a nurse when my wife, Jennifer, was delivering our third daughter at Tripler Army Medical Center, Hawaii. A student registered nurse anesthetist came into our room to place an epidural during labor. He spent several minutes talking to me about nurse anesthesia. It was in that moment I knew exactly what I wanted to do.

The best thing about my job is the wealth of opportunities it's provided. My active-duty career included becoming a certified registered nurse anesthetist (CRNA); saving lives in war zones after being recruited to join the Joint Special Operations Command; serving as chief of anesthesia at Brian Allgood Army Community Hospital in South Korea; and working for now-retired Army Lt. Gen. Patricia Horoho, then the Army surgeon general, as director of the surgical service line to implement policy to improve health care and readiness. After retirement, I became a professor at USU. I'm teaching mountain, cold weather, and dive medicine.

My most prominent memory of being a nurse is deploying to Abu Ghraib prison during the battle of Fallujah, 88 days after I graduated from USU as a CRNA. I finally understood what it meant to be an Army nurse. I had one mission, and one mission only: Save the lives of our nation's sons and daughters.

I was most challenged when the first casualties came into Abu Ghraib prison. We took care of both detainees and Americans. Triage was based on urgency and sometimes, that meant the enemy was treated before the American. I remember calling my dad and explaining this difficult situation. He said, "Son, your job is to take care of people medically. Your job is not to judge; that is God's job." It was at that moment the biggest challenge in my life was erased. I just did the best medicine I could.

My most memorable patient experience was treating a Marine who had multiple gunshot wounds, including in the head. He had a very poor chance of survival, but we worked on him for hours before he was medically transported to Germany. He later recovered fully and has gone on to get college degrees and start a business.

My nurse superpower is to find a way to yes. Achieving a ready medical force requires thinking outside the box, breaking status quo, taking risks, and forging a new course.