



COUNTERDRUG

COURIER



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Commander

Col. Suzanne Adkinson



Executive Officer

Lt. Col. Miguel Torres

Command Sergeant Major

Command Sgt. Maj. Jesus Gonzalez

Layout and Design

1st Lt. Alicia Lacy



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Commander's Comments

Integrity. Do the right thing when no one is looking. This is a foundational tenet in our Army and Air Force core values. But why is it so crucial for us to possess integrity? Why is it so important that our senior leaders of the Army and Air Force put it in our core values and have drilled it into us the first day we joined the military?

From the moment we're old enough to understand instruction, our parents taught us the difference between right and wrong and to always do the right thing. Integrity takes that lesson one step further; it urges us to do the right thing, even when no one is looking, even when you don't receive recognition for doing the right thing, even if you think you won't get caught. It's an issue of morality, ethics and honesty. It is the willingness to do what is right; it is our moral compass, our inner voice.

As service members, we are charged the nation. We are held to a higher standard than most. We are expected to have high moral character and the greater good. We're expected regardless of fault, embarrassment, consequences or perceptions. We hear commanders and leaders address integrity and how it's essential in our profession; we read commentary from leaders about the importance of possessing this character trait that we are required to put on everyday just as we put on our uniforms everyday. We can stand in formation reciting the Army and Air Force core values all day, but walk away and not think of it again until we're actually possessing completely different. So how do we practice this character trait that we should actually practice every day? It's easy. Every day we make hundreds of choices – simple and getting up on time to go to work, decisions, like waking up late and you were late. You can choose to one too many times, or you can may be a little more forgiving. Or it can be as complex as ensuring your troops are taken care of – professionally and in their personal lives, regardless of your personal feelings or issues or if that means you missing an opportunity or working late or not receiving visibility or recognition. It can be a lack of professionalism when you don't agree with a decision made by a superior. It can be a lack of respect. It can be pettiness. As I've stated before, integrity is doing the right thing – no matter what, regardless of fault, embarrassment, consequences or perceptions.



Col. Suzanne Adkinson, Commander
Texas Joint Counterdrug Taskforce

with being the protectors of freedom and standard than most. We are expected to the ability to make tough decisions for to do the right thing – no matter what, consequences or perceptions.

address integrity and how it's essential in from leaders about the importance of we are required to put on everyday just as to do our jobs. But being told to have integrity and practicing its elements is in formation and recite the Army and Air away and not think of it again until we're and Air Force core values. So how do seems more like an idea than something day? It's easy. Every day we make complex. It can be as straightforward as but sometimes other factors impact those having to explain to your supervisor why tell the truth and say you hit the snooze make up a story so that your supervisor

Ultimately, integrity is more than an idea or a word we recite as part of a set of values someone else established. It's a value and character trait we are expected to possess and one we should carry with us every day. It's an intrinsic element of a hero. I challenge each of you to be the heroes I know you are and to evaluate how you practice integrity in your everyday lives.

COUNTERDRUG COURIER

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HELP US HONOR OUR RETIREES



Lt. Col. Mark Welch



Master Sgt. Ken Walker



Texas Challenge

Eagle La



Class 20

June 18

Academy - East

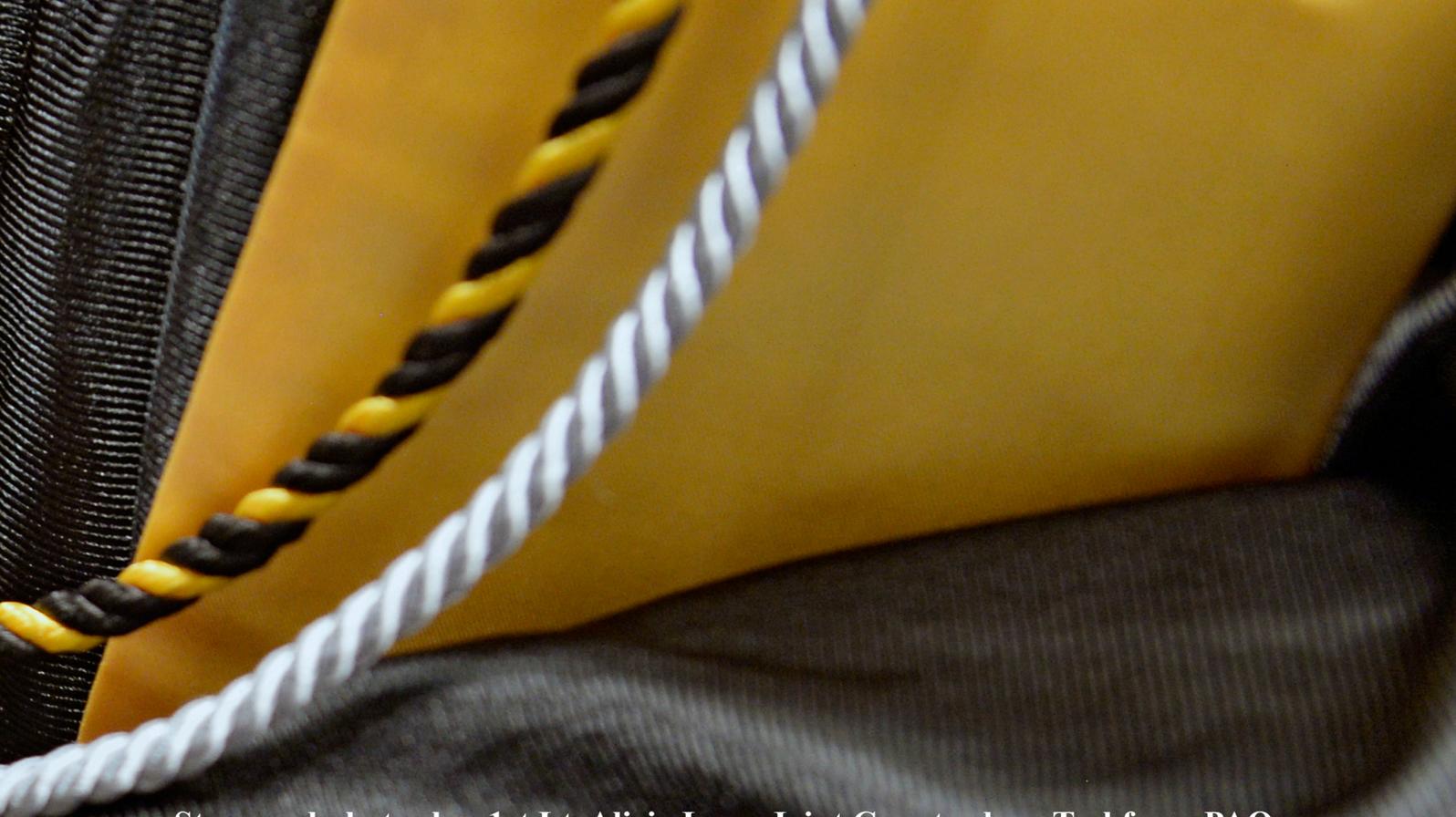
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, 2016



49 Texas youth
receive fresh start



Story and photos by: 1st Lt. Alicia Lacy, Joint Counterdrug Taskforce PAO

EAGLE LAKE, Texas – Their faces beamed with pride as the spotlights illuminated them. Some tried to maintain their bearing as they sat upright, but smiles emerged from others as cheers from their families, friends and staff who supported them throughout the residential phase of the Texas ChalleNGe Academy-East echoed in the auditorium.

The day had finally come. They were moments away from being Texas ChalleNGe Academy-East graduates during a ceremony June 18 at Rice Junior High School in Altair.

For the past 22 weeks, the cadets adhered to a strict, military lifestyle, waking up at 4:45 a.m. for physical training, attending classes during the day and turning in at 8:45 every night.

The 49 graduates have their own stories and different circumstances that brought them to the alternative education program, which is a Texas National Guard program under the Texas Joint Counterdrug Taskforce.

For some, it was a last option to reclaim their lives after a few bad decisions or life circumstances led them to dropout of high school or go down a wrong path and fall behind in their school work.

But regardless of the reason for attending TCA, they all finished with a new lease on life, with several earning their GEDs or high school diplomas or both.

CHANGE YOUR
WORDS

CHANGE YOUR
MINDSET

"I'm glad I took the opportunity to come here because it helped make me more responsible and take care of my stuff, myself and have discipline to not follow bad influences." - Cadet Andres Martinez





"but I believed in v

For Samantha Villarreal, 17, of Houston, it was a way for her to not give up on herself and accomplish something she said she thought wouldn't happen.

Villarreal said she began smoking when she was in the ninth grade. At that time, she started to lose interest in school and wanted to dropout, but because her parents stressed the importance of receiving an education, she began to look for alternative ways to complete high school. "Dropping out was never an option for me because my parents didn't graduate," she said, "so they wanted more for me."

Into her 10th grade year, Villarreal said she continued to smoke and eventually began a home school program, which she attended for only about a month before quitting that, too.

"I realized I'm here doing nothing and I'm supposed to be doing my school work and I'm not," she said about the home school.

After traditional high school and home school didn't work, Villarreal said she began searching for military schools and found the Texas ChalleNGe Academy.

Villarreal went in to the academy missing credits from her sophomore, junior and senior years of high school, but due to her work in the program, she was able to earn her GED and recover most of her credits. Now she only needs three more credits to earn her diploma.

Even though she has a GED, Villarreal said she plans to go back to school and earn her diploma and eventually join the military and go to college.

Andres Martinez, 17, of Brownsville, has a similar story. Martinez said he started doing drugs and his mom wanted to get him out of that environment.

Martinez said his mom and brother began looking for bootcamps to enroll him. When she found TCA, he said he was open to the idea of attending.

"I was pretty nervous," Martinez said, "but I believed in myself and that I was ready for it."

While at TCA, staff awarded Martinez the position cadet first sergeant. Staff holds the cadet first sergeant accountable for both student companies.

"I felt proud of myself to know that they were faithful in me to do that position," he said.

While at TCA, Martinez earned his GED and high school diploma and participated in the Commandant's Challenge. Martinez said he plans to join the National Guard and attend college with hopes of becoming a border patrol agent.

"I'm glad I took the opportunity to come here because it helped make me more responsible and take care of my stuff, myself and have discipline to not follow bad influences," he said.

Throughout the cycle, TCA cadets were able to meet with and work with Texas Joint Counterdrug Taskforce airmen and soldiers, who helped mentor them through the process.

TCA is a Texas National Guard-sponsored educational program to help at-risk youth between 16 and 18 years old get their lives back on track. The program is completely voluntary and requires a 17 and a half-month commitment. All cadets must not have any felony convictions and be drug free at the time of entry.

The academy is broken down into the 22-week residential phase and a 12-month, post-residential phase.

TCA focuses on eight core components – academic excellence, health and hygiene, job skills, leadership and followership, life-coping skills, physical fitness, responsible citizenship and service to the community.

In addition to their schoolwork, cadets had the opportunity to participate in other programs like archery, student council, student leadership positions and the Commandant's Challenge. Students also perform community service every Saturday and have the option to attend church and participate in intramural sports on Sundays.

TCA is a Department of Defense-funded program and receives 25 percent funding from the state. The program is free to Texas residents.

TCA's West campus in Sheffield plans to graduate 57 cadets June 24 in Iraan.

Both TCAs will begin its fall cycle in July.

myself..."



Texas Challenge

Sheffield



Class 20

June 25

Academy - West

ld, TX



015-2

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CHALLENGE COMPLETE: TEXAS CHALLENGE ACADEMY W



IRAAN, Texas -- For 22 weeks, they were challenged – by staff, by mentors, by each other and themselves. They endured early mornings of physical training, long days of schoolwork and military-style living, and nights of homework, chores and extracurricular activities. But they made it.

Fifty-seven young men successfully completed the residential phase of the Texas ChalleNGe Academy-West campus, and with recovered credits, GEDs and high school diplomas in tow, they said they were all ready to start new.

Staff, volunteers, family and friends recognized the 57 graduates during a ceremony June 25, 2016, in Iraan, Texas.

“This class really put the challenge in Texas ChalleNGe Academy,” said Michael Weir, TCA-W program director. “Today, we see the results of our hard work and these young men in their caps and gowns.

The alternative education program is a Texas National Guard program under the Texas Joint Counterdrug Taskforce whose mission is to “reclaim the potential of at-risk youth through education, training, mentoring and service to community.”

“Five and a half months ago, you embarked on a journey to take control of your lives, for whatever reason, and you’ve done that,” said Col. Suzanne Adkinson, Texas Counterdrug Taskforce commander. “You’ve met success in this program - each and every one of you.”

For some cadets, TCA was a last option to reclaim their lives after a few bad decisions or life circumstances led them to dropout of high school or go down a wrong path and fall behind in their school work. But regardless of the reason for attending TCA, they all finished with a new lease on life, with several earning their GEDs or high school diplomas or both.

Throughout the 22-week phase, the cadets collectively recovered and earned more than 650 high school credits,

Story and photos by: 1st Lt. Alicia Lacy, Joint Counterdrug Taskforce PAO

WEST CAMPUS GRADUATES 57



with 30 earning their GEDs, two earning a high school diplomas, and 13 cadets who earned both a high school diploma and GED.

“I came here as a sophomore and I’m leaving as a senior,” said David Luna Colon, a San Antonio native and cadet corps commander.

“It’s amazing,” he said about his peers and the program. “They pushed me and motivated me.”

While at TCA, Colon participated in the student council, the Commandant’s Challenge and the baseball team.

“I am very proud of him,” said Venessa Mendoza, Colon’s mom. “When we first started this, we were a little unsure about his future and his path, but I have no doubts now that he’s on a good path.”

TCA is geared to help at-risk youth between 16 and 18 years old get their lives back on track. The program is completely voluntary and requires a 17 and a half-month commitment.

All cadets must not have any felony convictions and be drug free at the time of entry.

The academy is broken down into the 22-week residential phase and a 12-month, post-residential phase.

TCA focuses on eight core components – academic excellence, health and hygiene, job skills, leadership and followership, life-coping skills, physical fitness, responsible citizenship and service to the community.

In addition to their schoolwork, cadets had the opportunity to participate in other programs like track, baseball and weightlifting teams, as well as student council, student leadership positions and the Commandant’s Challenge.

Students also perform community service every Saturday and have the option to attend church and participate in intramural sports on Sundays.

TCA is a Department of Defense-funded program and receives 25 percent funding from the state. The program is free to Texas residents.

Both TCAs will begin the fall cycle in July.



The Texas Joint Counterdrug Taskforce oversees the Department of Defense's STAR STEM summer camp for 10-12 year olds to motivate them to explore science, technology, engineering, and mathematics through hands-on and classroom activities, exploring Newton's Laws, Bernoulli's principle, and more. At the camp, students are able to engage with military personnel, while understanding how



STARBASE program in Houston and Austin. Last month, STARBASE Austin conducted its program in science, technology, engineering and math, as they continue their education. The program engages students in the 21st-century skills of communication, collaboration, critical thinking, and creativity. STARBASE follows the 4C's principle, nanotechnology, navigation, aviation and mapping. While at the STARBASE program, science, technology, engineering, and math are all incorporated in military careers.



{ 1962 - 2014 }

1st Sgt. Mario Quiñones



Legion of Merit

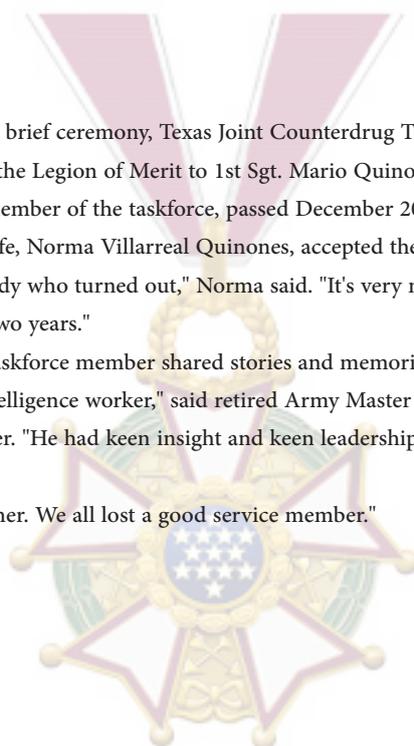
HOUSTON -- During a brief ceremony, Texas Joint Counterdrug Taskforce members posthumously awarded the Legion of Merit to 1st Sgt. Mario Quinones July 7, 2016. Quinones, a longtime member of the taskforce, passed December 2014. His son, Mario Quinones Jr., and his wife, Norma Villarreal Quinones, accepted the medal.

"I'm glad to see everybody who turned out," Norma said. "It's very meaningful to me. It's been a difficult almost two years."

During the ceremony, taskforce member shared stories and memories of Quinones.

"He was an excellent intelligence worker," said retired Army Master Sgt. Ken Walker, a former taskforce member. "He had keen insight and keen leadership and he was respected throughout the unit."

"We all lost a good brother. We all lost a good service member."





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