

Eagles in Uniform

Stories by Pat Spanjer and Stefanie Pettit

Service is the rent we pay for the privilege of living on this earth.

— Shirley Chisholm, first African American woman elected to Congress

People can give service in many ways. Yet, when a firefighter enters a burning structure, a soldier moves into a battle zone, a police officer responds to an emergency call – theirs is a level of service many others are not prepared to give.

Their uniforms identify them immediately. You know instantly who they are and what they are about. What they do is personal and dangerous and makes an impact in ways that few others of us can.

There has been and continues to be a number of graduates of Eastern Washington University who choose lives of frontline service. You'll meet a few of them here. These Eagles in uniform live and work every day paying the rent Shirley Chisholm speaks of.



1st Lt. Tracie Duncan

'02 B.S.N. nursing
Army Nurse
Madigan Medical Center, Ft. Lewis
Tacoma, Washington

Inside the ICU at Madigan Medical Center, Ft. Lewis.

There are traditions and there are *traditions*. "We always talked medical and military things over dinner," said Tracie Duncan, a 1999 graduate of Freeman High School just south of Spokane. "I always liked the military. I'm used to it, I understand it, I grew up in it. Besides, the Army health care system is the best in the world."

It's the kind of service she appreciates. "As a nurse, you can really give to people. As an Army nurse, you can give to those who have given in larger ways."

There's a deep and rich history of military and medical service in Tracie's family. Great-grandfather Howard Palmer was a medic in WWI. Grandfather Willard Duncan was an infantryman and POW in WWII. Father Tony Duncan was a drill sergeant in the Army for 21 years and served two tours of duty in Vietnam. Mother Debbie Duncan was an Army nurse for 22 years; grandmother Phyllis VanTin also was a nurse.

From her time as a junior volunteer at the Veteran's Hospital in Spokane ("It was a big deal for me to take care of them because I respect what they gave to our country") to her high school job as a nursing assistant at St. Luke's Extended Care Center, Tracie always knew what she wanted to do with her life.

She was drawn to EWU because of the nursing curriculum, quality ROTC program and closeness to her family in Valleyford, Wash.

Commissioned as an Army nurse in 2002, she was deployed in 2003 to Kuwait and later to Camp Anaconda in Balad, Iraq, where she worked as a staff nurse in the Intensive Care Unit (ICU).

"We got some of the most serious injuries there," she said. "I had good friends before I went to Iraq, but I've never had bonds with people like I had there. It was the best and the worst experience of my life."

Now working in the surgical open heart ICU at Ft. Lewis, Tracie

speaks softly when she remembers Iraq:

"We'd see kids whose wounds were too much, who were not going to make it through the night. I'd hold their hands and just be with them. Back home, in an ICU, their families would have been able to be there. But, in that place and that situation, when their families were far away, in their final moments, I was honored to act as their surrogate family. It was so powerful, both a horrible and an awesome feeling.

"I remember every single face of every soldier I took care of. They seemed so young."

Tracie is 24. She will be deployed soon, again to the Middle East.

"This isn't a job for me," she said, "it's a responsibility."

