

# Dept. of Military Affairs: War College a challenging but rewarding experience for Wisconsin Guard officer

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A Wisconsin Army National Guard officer has just completed a rare opportunity to “study, learn and serve as Army ambassadors.”

Lt. Col. Daniel Hendershot of Portage, Wisconsin, spent the past year at the University of Texas at Austin through a U.S. Army War College fellowship. There he studied and evaluated national security policy, strategy and operational issues.

Army National Guard officers compete for fellowship resident seats through the National Guard Bureau, Hendershot explained. His resident seat became available when competitive peers opted out of the application process two years ago.

“I had 24 hours to commit,” he said.

The U.S. Army War College is designed to push participants to challenge themselves, their peers and their leaders, he said. The program forced Hendershot and two active-duty Army officers “out of our comfort zone through discussion, reading — lots of reading — and writing. The unique experience cultivated better thinking and problem solving, which built upon a career’s worth of leadership experiences.”

Hendershot said he read about 25 books in 11 months, “and cannot wait to read another one.”

War College studies emphasized policy-making, global strategy and statecraft, with

lectures from general officers such as retired Adm. William McRaven — former commander of the U.S. Special Operations Command as well as former chancellor for the University of Texas system. Expectations for fellows included critical and creative thinking in addressing national security issues; evaluating theories of war, national security policy, strategic leadership, global security and regional issues in the context of strategic decision making; analyzing how strategic objectives could be achieved through regional, governmental, military, and private organization processes; and evaluating and synthesizing how domestic and foreign leaders, policy makers, scholars and dignitaries make decisions in strategic environments.

“It was clear I had missed something along the way,” Hendershot said of his prior national security understanding. “I was often ashamed by how little I knew about the Army, strategy, history and the Department of Defense enterprise.”

Hendershot enlisted in the Wisconsin Army National Guard in 2000 as an artillery fire support specialist. He commissioned into active duty after completing Reserve Officer Training Corps in 2004, and returned to the Wisconsin Army National Guard in 2008. He completed intermediate level education for senior captains and majors, as well as the advanced operations course, both which are designed to prepare Army officers to perform staff and command responsibilities. But he said it became clear during his year in the Army War College fellowship that those courses “did little to develop strategic mindfulness, which resides at the 4-star level.”

In hindsight, Hendershot said that in his first year holding the rank of major, he would have read more on strategic topics such as force modernization, climate change impact, global competition and democracy. He also would have sought a short, non-combat assignment outside of Wisconsin.

“It’s no wonder why we are encouraged to work at National Guard Bureau and NORTHCOM [North American Command],” he observed. “They open our eyes to real strategic concepts and complex problems.”

Hendershot said the U.S. War College fellowship was an incredible opportunity to expand his thinking beyond common practices in the Army and Army National Guard.

“The last two semesters at the University of Texas changed the way I think and process information,” he said. “It will impact my day-to-day contributions in the Army National Guard forever. The refined application of asking questions,

challenging leaders, referencing historical narrative and embracing the complexity of policy-making will permeate all aspects of my remaining time in uniform.

“We must send more Army National Guard officers to resident courses.”