

# National Guard: Wisconsin Guard member awarded Soldier's Medal for actions during train derailment

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A Wisconsin Army National Guard officer who helped victims of a train derailment in Joplin, Montana in 2021 received the Soldier's Medal in a July 9 ceremony at Spooner, Wisconsin.

The Soldier's Medal, established in 1926, is awarded to any person of the U.S. armed forces or of a friendly foreign nation who, while serving in any capacity with the U.S. Army, distinguished themselves by heroism not involving actual conflict with an enemy.

1st Lt. Apiwit B. Chulawan, an Orlando native now living in Madison, Wisconsin — and the executive officer with the Spooner-based 829th Engineer Vertical Construction Company — was on a train bound for Seattle when it derailed on Sept. 21, 2021.

"It was scary, but it had to be so much scarier for the people in the train cars behind us that tipped over," Chulawan said.

After a moment to recover from the shock of the derailment, Chulawan's military training took over.

"I went back to my luggage, got the first-aid kit I always keep on me, and began to triage the situation in the other cars," Chulawan said. "My military training offered a framework to help me establish next steps, organize my efforts and to offer meaningful assistance to people in need until emergency responders arrived."

Maj. Gen. Paul E. Knapp, Wisconsin's adjutant general, presented the Soldier's

Medal to Chulawan, stating that his actions were in keeping with the finest traditions of the National Guard.

“He epitomizes what it means to be a Citizen-Soldier, which is to always be ready at a moment’s notice,” Knapp said.

Chulawan — a Wisconsin Army National Guard member since 2016 and air assault school qualified — hopes that his story encourages others to prepare in case they are ever in a similar situation.

“I recommend that everyone take basic first-aid courses, whether through the military or a civilian route,” Chulawan said.

Capt. Daniel Bruins, commander of the 829th, agreed with the adjutant general that Chulawan exemplified the finest qualities of a Citizen-Soldier during a large-scale traumatic accident by setting aside his own needs to help others.

“Selfless service, dedication to duty and personal courage,” Bruins said. “He brought great honor to himself, his family and the United States Army.