

THE ODYSSEY OF TENTINGER

By Meredith Resnick

When in Iraq, an international correspondent labeled him the “Dinosaur of War” because he’d served in three major conflicts in the last three decades. Earlier this year, he was named something else: Naval Reserve Force Sailor of the Year. Meet Hospital Medical Corpsman Chief Larry Tentinger.

“Military membership is a higher calling,” says HMC (FMF) Larry Tentinger on why people gravitate to the armed forces. “My dad,” a Marine in Okinawa, “embodied the military core values in the way he lived his life,” he says. Like his dad, Tentinger was also drafted into the military. Even if given the choice, he says, he wouldn’t have had it any other way. Honor. Courage. Commitment. “I wanted the same for myself,” Tentinger says. Then he was sent overseas. “I remember being in Vietnam witnessing firsthand the price we paid for freedom, [and it] gave me a [first-hand], personal perspective on what my father did.”



Then HM1 Tentinger and VADM Cotton

Chief Tentinger at a Glance

- Born: Hawarden, Iowa on May 17, 1950
- Personal data: Married to Darlene; children - Travis, Melissa and Amanda.
- Current residence: Beresford, South Dakota
- Dedication to duty: Tentinger was only four weeks away from retirement eligibility when he was called to serve last year in Iraq. Now, he says he’s “fired up and ready” to stay in longer. “I think my earlier experiences in Vietnam and Desert Storm helped the younger sailors this time around,” he says.
- Overcoming the odds: Despite weighing only two pounds at birth, Tentinger’s dedication and work ethic allowed him to become a powerlifter capable of competing on the national level and winning several national championships, including back-to-back Armed Forces Powerlifting Championships in 1995 and 1996, and the National Masters Powerlifting Championships in 1997.
- Awards of which he is most proud: Combat action ribbon for service as a field corpsman with the Marines in Iraq; Kuwait Liberation medal for service as a medical corpsman in Desert Storm; Vietnam Campaign ribbon for service as an Army combat medic in Vietnam.

For Tentinger, this was his higher calling.

Tentinger spent about five years active duty with the Army in the early 1970s, then rejoined the military as a Naval Reservist in 1987. He currently serves with the Fleet Hospital Dallas out of Sioux City, Iowa.

“I wanted to be the kind of person others could trust to get the job done,” he says from his office at the University of South Dakota where he serves as an assistant professor in the Division of Technology for Education and Training and as a director for Interactive Technology for Education & Corporations (InTEC).

About the Reserves, Tentinger says he’s humbled by “those people I work with day in and day out, those I’ve had the opportunity to lead and serve.” Though military life is built on a hierarchy, “in the final scenario it is all centered around teamwork.”

Tentinger recalls when he was selected one of five finalists for the honor of Naval Reserve Force Sailor of the Year, he and the others used their initial contact via e-mail not as a competition, but as a teambuilding exercise. “We wanted to work as a team to make it harder for Vice Admiral John Cotton to make his choice,” he says laughing.

“Even up to the final level of competition, we worked as a team.”

