

# SURVIVING THE CUT

Sgt. John Winn Jr. of Katy completes elite Army Ranger School, filmed by the Discovery Channel

*Written by Cherri Northcutt*

Along with graduating from Army Ranger School, Sgt. John Winn Jr. of Katy has also served with the U.S. Marine Corps, on elite Special Forces, and with the Army on his most recent deployment to Iraq



Photo by Lara Massey, Sassy Massey Photography

Imagine battling water moccasins, alligators, and scorpions in the swamps of Florida, while suffering from heat exhaustion, skin rashes, and hypothermia. Now imagine having a TV show capture these intense moments of struggle in some of the most trying situations possible. For Sgt. John Winn Jr. of Katy, the experience was all part of the training he underwent during U.S. Army Ranger School, filmed in part by the Discovery Channel for an episode of the TV show *Surviving the Cut*. "It's the first time anyone was allowed to film this semi-secret world of how we train our combat leaders," Sgt. Winn shares.

### Pushing the Limits

The choice to go to Ranger School at the age of 43 was not an easy decision to make. "I noticed in the Army, we had pictures on the wall of our leaders," Sgt. Winn explains. "One thing that always stood out was the officers who had the Ranger tab. I figured, to enhance my career, I would need to become a Ranger," he says. Though he admired the Rangers, Sgt. Winn knew that the school would be difficult, stretching him beyond his limits. "I did not want to subject myself to that kind of physical and mental abuse," he admits. "I got to a crossroads, [though], and something inside me said, 'You need to do this.'"

Off and on during the school's 61 days of grueling military leadership courses, as Sgt. Winn powered his way through extreme situations alongside his fellow soldiers, cameras were following their every move. "Having a TV crew there wasn't really a distraction," he shares, adding, "They stayed off to the side, and you never really knew who the camera was on."

The most difficult phase Sgt. Winn encountered in Ranger School came when navigating the Florida swamps. "Imagine walking through the swamp at night in water up to your chest, while carrying 100 pounds on your back," he explains. He can still recall the intense pain caused by huge blisters on his feet, and having to stay strong and move forward despite it all. "Ranger School is designed to simulate unconventional

combat situations," says Sgt. Winn. "The only thing that wasn't real in our program was the bullets."

### Called to Serve

For Sgt. Winn, serving his country in uniform is his life's calling. "I joined the Marines at a very young age," he recalls. "The Marine Corps are known as the toughest, baddest guys on the block." While attending college, he knew he wanted to serve in the Armed Forces. "My father was a Marine [and] my uncles all served in the military," he shares. "I believe

there's no more important responsibility for an American than to serve our country."

In 2010, he married his wife Julie, who has always been his biggest cheerleader. "My wife has always supported me 110%," Sgt. Winn says. "Our commitment to each other is as strong as it's always been." She takes pride in his distinguished military career, which has spanned 25 years and includes two tours of duty in Iraq. "He is very accomplished and takes his military career seriously," Julie says. "I'm very proud of him. So few people can say they've done the things that he has done."

During Operation Desert Storm, Sgt. Winn was selected for Force Recon, an elite Special Forces unit. Their mission was to go behind enemy lines and try to neutralize scope launchers. "We had a pretty harrowing experience there for a couple of weeks," he remembers. "Our secondary mission was to stand by for a downed pilot rescue."

In 2008, Sgt. Winn joined the Army and was assigned to Fort Hood, where he served on a field artillery unit. After only five months, he was deployed to Iraq,

where he was assigned to a protective services detachment. "I was overseeing a personal security detachment to protect the Mayor of Mosul," he says. "It was hairy; terrorists were constantly trying to get to the mayor." On a daily basis, Sgt. Winn's unit of 20 soldiers dealt with threats, assassination attempts, and explosives along their routes.



Sgt. Winn, during his most recent deployment to Iraq, with his commander and first sergeant, who worked to secure a water pump site at the Euphrates River near the city of Nasiriyah




Dr. Robert Graves, former U.S. secretary of defense, visited Sgt. Winn's Army Ranger School class in 2007, expressing his appreciation to the soldiers



*Family Physicians of Katy*  
 Medical Care for the Entire Family

- ~ Well Child Exams and School Physicals
- ~ Adult Physicals and Well Woman Exams
- ~ Adult and Child Vaccinations
- ~ Diabetes
- ~ High Blood Pressure
- ~ High Cholesterol



Dr. Tami Stout, husband Chris, and children

**Dr. Tami Stout, M.D., P.A.**  
 Board Certified in Family Medicine

707 South Fry Rd, Suite 280  
 Katy, Texas 77450

Call today to schedule your appointment!  
**(281) 398-5360**

© 2011 Katy Magazine

**SPRINGER LAW FIRM**  
 Attorney & Mediator

*The issues which impact our clients' lives are important to us, and we work hard to promote their positions.*

- Estate Planning and Probate
- Family Law
- Mediation
- Contracts



21218 Kingsland Blvd.  
 Katy, Texas 77450

**281-646-0644**  
 www.sarahspringer.org

Sarah Springer  
 Former Judge

Sgt. John Winn and his wife Julie, with their daughter Kylie and son Kameron McGusty

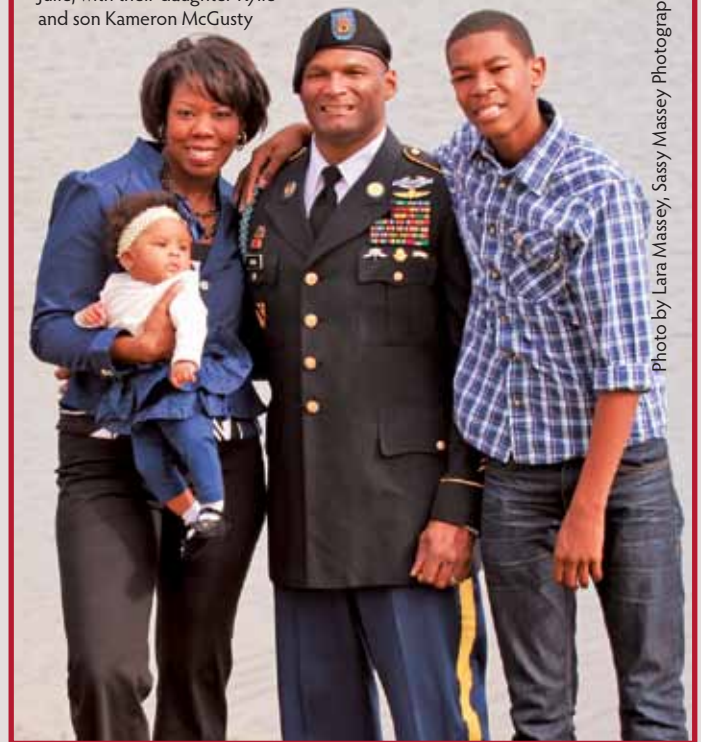


Photo by Lara Massey, Sassy Massey Photography

**Growing as a Leader**

It was then that Sgt. Winn decided to take his leadership skills to the next level, by enrolling in Ranger School. First, though, he had to sign up for a pre-Ranger course, where instructors determined who would make the cut. Starting out alongside 100 fellow soldiers from Fort Hood, Sgt. Winn saw the group dwindle down to 50 by the end of the first day. "It was very grueling," he remembers. "You have to have the desire and the intestinal fortitude to get through it." After two weeks of the pre-Ranger course, Sgt. Winn was chosen to go on to Ranger School, claiming one of only 12 spots allotted to soldiers at Fort Hood.

"On the first day of Ranger School, I was amazed by the caliber of military personnel," Sgt. Winn shares. "There were officers from all over the world. At the time, I was unaware that we had that much international involvement." Among the 408 men attending Ranger School, Sgt. Winn trained alongside officers from Bosnia, Spain, Egypt, and Africa. "The first week was the weed-out phase," he explains. "By the end of that week, we were drastically reduced to about half." After the first week, the Ranger students began going through various phases of training. With each new phase, the level of intensity increased.

Now looking back on his accomplishments, he has had the chance to be part of something much larger than himself and has the opportunity to give back in an even greater way to his country as a leader. *Surviving the Cut* originally aired on the Discovery Channel in 2010. "It was exciting to see John on TV," shares Julie Winn, adding, "I was that much more proud of him, because I saw what he went through. And I thought he was really handsome." **KM**

*CHERRI NORTHCUTT is a freelance writer and has lived in Katy for 11 years with her husband and two daughters.*