

VISION



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As seen through the eyes of Lt. Col. Wilson Ariza



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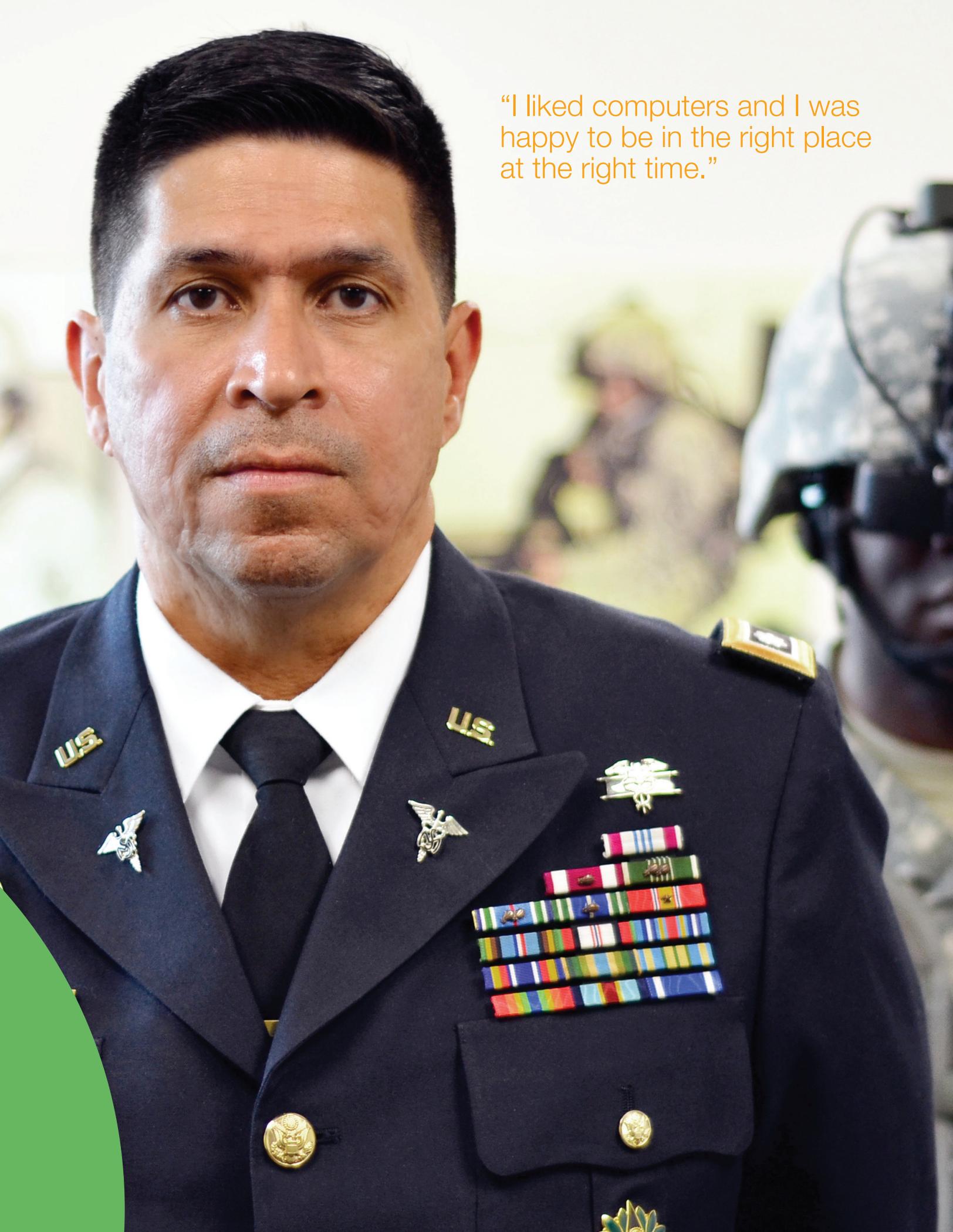
Pulling Together for a Better World

by George Fournier

IN

places like Iraq, Afghanistan and Bosnia, he saw the horrors of war. In the faces of the military men and women who made personal sacrifices for peace, he saw a reason for hope. As seen through the eyes of Lieutenant Colonel Wilson Ariza, life is more than just an uncertain mix of good and bad. It is a bright opportunity to work with others for a better world.

“I liked computers and I was happy to be in the right place at the right time.”





When you first meet Wilson Ariza, you see a remarkable combination of military experience, medical training, and information technology savvy. With numerous deployments to war zones, he knows the experience of being under fire. With a love for healing (his mother was a nurse) he enlisted in the U.S. Army as a combat medic. With an ability to grasp the power of computers, he was instrumental in applying modern technology to the practice of medicine.

On a deeper level, you also discover a humble man who is deeply committed to a vitally important mission. He wants to save lives.

4:00 a.m. in the Morning

We'll start Wilson's story on the campus of the University of Puerto Rico following his earlier enlistment as an Army combat medic. At the university, he was a full-time student, had a full-time job, and got up at 4 a.m. to participate in ROTC. In a national competition, Wilson earned recognition as the top cadet in ROTC for Puerto Rico - an achievement that led to his commission in the Army Medical Service Corps.

During the 1990s, the Medical Service Corps had a growing interest in information technology. As Wilson puts it, "I liked computers and I was happy to be in the right place at the right time." In Fort Sam Houston in San Antonio, Texas, he led the team that started an IT career field for officers in the Army Medical Department.

After this fast start, Wilson's career continued to accelerate. Upon completing his Master's degree in Health Services Administration and Information Management, he was deployed as Deputy Surgeon, Joint Guard in Bosnia. There he used his technology expertise to employ telemedicine technology in that troubled area for the first time.

More Firsts

Among the lessons learned from the first Gulf War was the need for battlefield access to the medical records of soldiers. After the war, President George H.W.

Bush asked the U.S. Surgeon General to make it happen. At the time, Wilson was the Chief Information Officer at Darnall Army Community Hospital at Fort Hood in Texas. According to him, his superiors thought that he "was an IT person, had hospital administration experience, loved computers, and came from a school of medicine." They figured Wilson was the right person to answer the President's directive.

The history-making project was called the Medical Communications for Combat Casualty Care program. The program acquisition cost was \$750 million. The cost to Wilson was two-and-a half years of deployment during Operation Iraqi Freedom and Enduring Freedom. The payback was in knowing that he and his team were saving lives and providing the highest level of medical care.

Sand on the Floor

Today, Wilson is a resident of Central Florida and has the rather lengthy title of program manager for the U.S. Army Medical Simulation Program at the Program Executive Office for Simulation, Training & Instrumentation (STRI). He is the first person to hold the title - a job that keeps him on the road three weeks out of four.

Today, medical simulation has become the safest way to learn patient treatment procedures without practicing on live patients. Trainees work on "patient simulators," which are highly sophisticated mannequins that can blink, breathe, cough and even bleed.

Part of Wilson's demanding job is to direct material development, acquisition, and support to the Army's 23 worldwide Medical Simulation Training Centers (MSTC) which currently use patient simulation technology.

To date, with the help of Wilson and his team, more than 400,000 service personnel have been trained to perform medical procedures under highly realistic conditions. If a combat medic needs to learn how to apply a tourniquet on a desert battlefield, a desert environment, complete with sand, is recreated at the MSTC facility. All the while, the simulated patient on the simulated battlefield manifests very real reactions to treatment. It is a dramatic advancement in medical training that, according to a September 2009 assessment by the Defense Health Board, has saved an estimated 1000 lives in Iraq and Afghanistan.

The Epicenter for Medical Simulation - Central Florida

Recently, the Veteran Health Administration began implementation of its Simulation Learning, Education and Resource Network in its more than 170 medical centers around the country. Wilson was instrumental in coordinating the agreement between the VHA and the STRI here in Orlando. He now serves as the acquisition program manager for the network, helping to make Central Florida the epicenter for military medical simulation training.

The Network will be headquartered at the VHA's newest medical center located in East Orlando in the Medical City complex at Lake Nona. Part of the new center is the Medical Simulation Center of Excellence that will serve as the baseline model for today's most advanced medical simulation technology. As the Army's Medical Liaison for Medical City, Wilson is again a pioneer for positive change. He notes, "Not only will people come to Orlando to go to the Disney parks, but also to learn the latest technologies in medical simulation."

La Familia Grande

After 24 years in service to his country, Lt. Col. Ariza has a special affection for the Army, the people who mentored him, and the people with whom he worked. "We are a big family. We are in this business because we want a better world," he says.

Wilson's sense of family and his core values were instilled by his parents. Later, they were shaped by his military service, and by interactions with diverse cultures around the world. His values have also been strengthened by his responsibilities as a husband and father of two girls.

These experiences have helped Wilson recognize his responsibility to mentor and support others. Together with his wife, Nitza, he has started youth groups, and demonstrated to youngsters that hard work and having dreams are the foundations for success. Together, they have also helped immigrants of all nationalities with paperwork for citizenship or for starting a business. Also, as a member of the Hispanic Chamber of Commerce of Metro Orlando, Wilson has encouraged networking among fellow Hispanics, helping to generate opportunities for mutual support.

A Pioneer's Dream

As a pioneer with a dream, Wilson still looks to the future. He is currently working on his doctorate at the University of Central Florida, combining a study of human factors and medical simulation.

It is not possible to condense a career as big as Lt. Col. Ariza's into a few short paragraphs. So we'll let his words speak for themselves: "I want to see how we can all come together to contribute to a better nation and a better world, and to do that we all need to pull together."

Wilson and his "familia grande" have done just that. 🌟

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