



Veteran of the Month September 2003

Congratulations to Will Merchen!

In partnership with the Veterans Coordination Commission, I am pleased to present the September, 2003 Veteran of the Month – Will Merchen.

Will's service to the community and nation started early. At the age of 6, he became active in Boy Scouting and worked his way up to the rank of Eagle Scout. He actively maintained his membership in the troop, as an adult leader, until graduating from Rapid City Central High School in 1999. Upon graduation, Will joined the United States Navy, attending boot camp and Damage Controlman Class "A" School at Great Lakes Naval Training Center.

Will's first duty assignment was aboard the Guided Missile Destroyer USS Cole DDG-67, where he was promoted to Petty Officer 3rd Class. While underway on his first major deployment, his ship was attacked by suicide bombers in the Port of Aden, Yemen. Using the skills he learned as a Boy Scout and those since joining the Navy, Will was instrumental in saving the lives of many fellow crewmen. Disregarding his own personal safety, he rushed to the scene of an unknown attack, and rendered assistance in leading fellow crewmembers to safety. He further provided aid to Senior Chief Petty Officer Keith Lorenson by performing potentially lifesaving first aid, including administering oxygen, controlling severe bleeding, treating for shock and evacuating Senior Chief Lorenson from the area of immediate danger. Will's contribution to saving his fellow crewmen and his ship did not end there. He further demonstrated heroism by assisting in the rescue of severely/terminally injured sailors from the harbor waters, by using power equipment to rescue sailors trapped in the mangled steel of the ship's kitchen and equipment, and by initiating and maintaining, for days, emergency maintenance procedures that saved the ship from sinking. Will was decorated by the United States Navy for his heroic actions onboard the USS Cole with the Meritorious Service Medal, and by the Boy Scouts of America with the Honor Medal with Crossed Palms.

Upon the ship's return to the United States for overhaul, Will was transferred to the pre-commissioning crew and became a plank owner on board the USS Bulkely in Pascagoula, Mississippi and was promoted to Petty Officer 2nd Class. Upon the birth of his second child, he was transferred to the security detachment at the Norfolk Naval Air Station Norfolk, Virginia.

Will was honorably discharged from the Navy in January of 2003 and returned to his hometown of Rapid City. Will has renewed his activity in his old Boy Scout Troop, becoming an Assistant Scoutmaster and, despite the fact that he has no children in the troop; he is adding his leadership skills to a very active group of boys. Will is active in his church assisting with the youth group. Will is an active member in American Legion Post 320 and the Veterans of Foreign Wars Post 1273. Will is employed by Peace Keepers Security of Rapid City, and hopes to pursue a career with law enforcement in the Rapid City area.