



Standing in full uniform, retired Master Sgt. William "Billy" Walker Powers served more than two decades in the U.S. Army, including deployments with the 82nd Airborne Division and assignments in intelligence and Special Forces. An Army Ranger and former Ranger instructor, he was awarded a Bronze Star Medal among many other commendations. His military career shaped his leadership and lifelong friendships.

credible. It blew my mind that I was even close to these guys. They're my heroes in the Army—and everyone's heroes—but I never went. I decided to go back on active duty."

On Sept. 11, 2001, he was in the middle of a physical exam when officials announced they were halting processing for the day. The United States was under attack, and everyone was quickly informed of the unfolding crisis.

"I wanted to go to war," he said. "That was my job, and that was my mindset at the time. I went back in and got orders for Fort Lewis with the 25th Infantry Division again, which had since moved. I submitted my packet for Special Forces, then ended up dropping it to go to Delta Selection. That was an eye-opener. I realized I was nowhere near that level. We had to do a road march—a hike with about 50 to 60 pounds on our backs. They dropped us off in the middle of the West Virginia mountains and said, 'Stay on the road ahead. See you later,' and drove off. I made it to about mile 18 and twisted my ankle."

Powers returned to Special Forces Selection and was chosen as a medic. He was stationed at Fort Bragg and had reached Phase Two, the path toward earning a Green Beret. Then his aunt, Phyllis Emmick, called with a Red Cross message. He was two miles away and hurried back to the office. On the way, he dreaded the news. When he arrived, he learned his father, William Freeman Powers Jr, had been diagnosed with a brain tumor.

"I needed to be somewhere that I could have close access to come back here with Mom (Judith Estes Powers)," he said. "She's a carpenter, a plumber, an electrician—she can do everything herself—but I still wanted to be close by."

Next, Powers was stationed at the 82nd Airborne Division headquarters at Fort Bragg, North Carolina. In 2005, he was among the first from his unit to put boots on the ground and help victims displaced by Hurricane Katrina.

"I got back and received orders to be a Ranger Instructor in the mountains of Dahlonega, Georgia," he said. "The 5th Ranger Training Battalion is there. I was an E-7 (sergeant first class), at the time. I taught all aspects of combat operations in a mountain environment. I taught mountaineering, so I'm a military mountaineer. I went to Vermont, ice-climbed, and slept in snow caves I built myself. When I came back, I instructed for a while. I hadn't deployed at that point, so I was a 'slick sleeve,' meaning my right sleeve didn't have a combat patch. There are a lot of E-7s like that—it's just timing and the way it works. I went to Fort Stewart first, and then to Iraq."

From 2009 to 2010, Powers deployed to Iraq with the 101st Airborne Division. After returning, he was promoted to master sergeant.

"While I was over there, I was already jockeying to get back to the mountains as a mountain Ranger instructor. I didn't know I was going to be promoted," he said. "So now I was heading there as an E-8 (master sergeant). I stayed about a year. It was okay, but I didn't like being at that level because I wasn't really with the boys anymore. Once you move to higher positions, you lose that camaraderie because now you're the boss—and everybody hates you. I went back to Fort Stewart in Savannah, Georgia, and then deployed to Afghanistan."

In 2012, he deployed to Afghanistan with the 82nd Airborne Division during a year-long mission in which the division served as the headquarters for Regional Command South. This deployment involved approximately 10,000 paratroopers operating across a vast area from Kandahar in the south to Afghanistan's

eastern border. Their work included combat advising Afghan security forces and conducting operations against insurgent forces in Taliban-held territories, particularly in volatile provinces such as Ghazni. The 82nd Airborne, known as the All-American Division, played a critical role in bolstering security and stabilizing the region while demonstrating their rapid-response capabilities as part of the XVII Airborne Corps.

"We were rocketed almost every day, but it didn't bother me," he said. "I knew their capabilities, and it would take sheer luck to get me hurt. I was kind of out of a job. I wasn't going to be a first sergeant in the infantry because I didn't want to take a slot from someone planning to stay longer. I was only over there five months because I had already dropped my retirement paperwork three days before deploying. They assigned me to the Intelligence Brigade. Before, I was always an intel collector—not in the brigade itself. It was incredible—like something out of a Jason Bourne movie. It just blew my mind. We completed over 150 combat missions in Afghanistan, most of which I planned. We came back with zero casualties and no equipment losses. I'm glad, not because I got an award, but because I didn't lose anyone over there. The whole thing with the kid that got killed when I was at Fort Campbell, that was probably the biggest reason I got out."

He retired on April 1, 2014, coincidentally the same day his cousin, Mark Powers—a former Hancock County Sheriff's Deputy and School Resource Officer at Hancock County Schools—retired from the Owensboro Police Department.

Powers also served as an intelligence noncommissioned officer, rising to leadership roles up to first sergeant. He was known for balancing discipline with genuine care for his soldiers. When discipline was necessary, he favored physical fitness as a corrective measure.

"When I was at Fort Lewis, I served as the Striker Brigade platoon sergeant," he said. "When I decided to pursue Special Forces, at least six people in our company left because they didn't want another platoon sergeant. They wanted me because I helped people. I wasn't one of those old, mean drill sergeants, and that's the truth. That kind of got to my heart a little bit. It made me think I must be doing an okay job, because you always wonder whether you're doing a good job or not."

One of Powers' most difficult duties, he said, was delivering casualty notifications. These solemn responsibilities require notifying next of kin in person, often accompanied by a chaplain or medical personnel, and must be handled with dignity and sensitivity, typically within hours of learning of a soldier's death or serious injury. It involves clear communication of the circumstances, providing support, and ensuring privacy for grieving families, making it one of the heaviest aspects of military leadership.

"They called and said I had to be in Asheville, North Carolina. We underwent training on what to say. It was a 3-day course. That was probably the most awful part of my career—knocking on that door and seeing a young redheaded woman who thought her husband was all okay, and having to tell her. That tore me up. While doing it, I stayed calm and composed," he said. "But when I left, it changed my life and shifted my idea about what we were doing over there a little bit. When I returned, they needed me to do an interview on what it's like being in casualty notification."

Later, his experience was featured in Army training films designed to prepare other soldiers for the emotional challenges of casualty notification.

On a lighter note, camaraderie and lasting friendships are hallmarks of military life. Soldiers often forge deep bonds through shared challenges and experiences, relationships that endure long after their service ends.

"I have so many Army friends. They are the best friends I'll ever have," he said. "If I called any of them right now and said I needed somewhere to stay for a month or two, they would put me up in a heartbeat without even asking me why, and I'm the same way."

He said they stay in touch daily through a large group text and have also maintained their connection over the years using Facebook.

"Last year, we held a reunion at an Airbnb in Cloverport, a pole barn home that could accommodate 12 people," he said. "It was just amazing. I coordinated it, and was tour guide and brought them out here on the farm. I contacted John Deere, that I used to work for, and they donated a six-seater Gator. We had two more Gators out there, and I took them out on the farm and had a range setup with all my weapons. It was such a good time—sharing old stories. Fort Campbell is the same way, especially the platoon I was in that lost a soldier."



Retired Master Sgt. William "Billy" Walker Powers, then a U.S. Army soldier stationed in Hawaii, is pictured in front of the same chapel at the barracks where his grandfather, William Freeman Powers Sr., took a similar photo while serving as an Army engineer during World War II.

Every year, we try to go down there and do something. That's the way we stay together. It's really awesome to be able to do that. They are my best friends."

Powers said he had several mentors in the Army who served as important role models. However, he credited his parents as his primary positive influences throughout his life.

"My dad was a role model, always," he said. "I never saw Mom and Dad argue—not once. Other mentors were First Sgt. Greg Baker, and the late Sgt. Sid Agent, who was my very first team leader. His dad was a Navy SEAL, so you can imagine how by-the-book he was, which was good. For new soldiers coming in, you need a strong team leader to show you the ropes."

He strongly encourages young people to enlist in the military after graduating from high school.

"If you don't know what you want to do, join the military. It's a great opportunity. I wish I would have never gotten out," Powers said. "I kind of wish I'd stayed in after '96 and just kept going. Everything really does happen for a reason, though. I think I've been very blessed and fortunate with what I have. It's been pretty good, and the military was the biggest reason for that. It really shaped what I wanted to do in life. It shaped me as a worker and as a trustworthy person."

Military service runs deep in his family. His grandfather, William Freeman Powers Sr, served as an Army engineer in Hawaii during World War II, helping build airfields. Powers cherishes a photograph given to him by his grandmother, Nellie Gray Powers, showing his grandfather standing in front of one of Schofield Barracks' chapels.

"There are five chapels on Schofield Barracks. I found the one from the photo she sent me in the mail, and took a picture in front of it. I was less than a foot from where he was standing in his picture—same angle, same everything. The palm tree that was behind him was about shoulder-high then, and 40 years later, it was huge," he said. "I have the two pictures mounted side by side in a frame. He'd written a note on the back to Nellie. I rewrote it on the back of my picture before sending it back to her. She later framed them together and wanted me to have it, which was heartwarming."

Powers and his wife, Michelle, live in Tell City and operate a seasonal agritourism business at Lead Creek Farm in Hawesville. They hosted their third season this year, featuring hayrides, corn mazes, animal interactions and other family activities. Updates are available on the Lead Creek Farm Facebook page and at leadcreekfarm.godaddysites.com.

The family is blended, with Powers' four daughters—Emalee, Bailey, Devyn and Ryleigh—and Michelle's children, Alex and Coy. They are also blessed with four grandchildren: Zaylee, Emslee, Briggs and Lincoln.



With our hearts filled with gratitude and eyes filled with tears, we thank all you brave men and women who sacrificed so much, so that we could have a better life and a country to call home. Thank you so much.



10455 St. Rt. 37
Tell City, IN
www.attcmfg.com