



21st Theater Sustainment Command
16th Sustainment Brigade
18th Combat Sustainment Support Battalion
Public Affairs Office
USAG Grafenwoehr, Germany
DSN 475-4197
Commercial from U.S.: 011-49-964-183-4197

18th CSSB Soldier takes on ESPN – on and off the ice

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GRAFENWOEHR, Germany – In preparation for ESPN’s live Veteran’s Day show at the Grafenwoehr Training base, several news media representatives from ESPN visited Soldiers here Sept. 13-17 for pre-interviews and tapings.

One of the Soldier-athletes interviewed was Staff Sgt. Christopher Sheehan, a native of Boston, Mass., who works as a heavy construction engineer and platoon sergeant for 23rd Ordnance Company, 18th Combat Sustainment Support Battalion, 16th Sustainment Brigade.

While it is not uncommon to interact with reporters and media personnel in places like Iraq or Afghanistan, finding out ESPN wanted to interview him was an exciting surprise to Sheehan, who feels just as comfortable on the ice with a hockey stick in hand as he does in the field carrying an M-16 rifle.

“I was humbled and glad to get the word out about the human side of Army veterans playing the sports they love. The bonds formed on the ice are just as strong as those formed on the front lines. For example, two of my first season team members will be coordinating their

vacation time from downrange around the Armed Forces Europe Invitational Hockey Tournament at the end of January,” said Sheehan.

Sheehan was an exceptional candidate for ESPN due to the various sports and Soldier activities he has participated in throughout his adult life.

“For ESPN his story was unique, even more so due to his language skills because he was able to be interviewed for ESPN SportsCenter in English and their Spanish language channel ESPN Deportes,” said Denver Makle, a native of Waldorf, Md., who works as the Joint Multinational Training Command’s deputy public affairs officer.

Sheehan had initially wanted to enlist in the Army as a Spanish linguist, but it was the mentorship of a high school coach who helped him divert his path just a little.

Sheehan said he remembers how his high school hockey coach told him he could join the Army at any time, but if he wanted to learn Spanish the best way was complete cultural immersion. With a phone call to a friend in Europe, Sheehan’s coach set him up with a newly formed Spanish hockey team out of Barcelona, Spain, called Anoia Hockey Club.

For three seasons Sheehan developed his hockey game by playing any position available on the team, and he developed his mind by learning Spanish.

In 2000 Sheehan came back to the U.S. and enlisted as a medic in the Massachusetts Army Reserves. He was soon able to use his Spanish language skills on a humanitarian mission to Ecuador where he assisted medical teams in giving aid to the local people.

It was during the initial interview with ESPN that Sheehan invited one of the feature producers, Denny Wolfe, who was himself a hockey player, to come out and join him during the upcoming Bayern Rangers practice.

The Bayern Rangers hockey team is comprised of Soldiers and Department of the Army civilians. This year is the team's second season, and they are planning to expand on their game time from last year, where they had only played in preparation for the annual hockey tournament in Garmisch, Germany.

With borrowed gear and a bit of a grin, Wolfe joined the Rangers for a pick-up game.

"It was a complete blast, and they even made me an honorary member," Wolfe said. "It was such a privilege for me to share this time with the Army players, and I was greatly touched as to what lengths they went so that I could play.

I'm going to try and come support the guys during their hockey tournament," he added



ESPN Feature Producer Denny Wolfe (left) interviews Staff Sgt. Christopher Sheehan Sept. 13 in preparation for ESPN's Veteran's Day live show. The interview took place in the 18th Combat Sustainment Support Battalion's consolidated motor pool. Sheehan is a native of Boston, Mass., who works as a heavy construction engineer and platoon sergeant for 23rd Ordnance Company, 18th CSSB. (Photo by Capt. Jennifer Dyrzcz, 18th CSSB PAO)



Staff Sgt. Christopher Sheehan skates around the Weiden Ice Rink during a Bayern Rangers practice Sept.16. Sheehan is a native of Boston, Mass., who works as a heavy construction engineer and platoon sergeant for 23rd Ordnance Company, 18th CSSB. (Photo by Capt. Jennifer Dyrz)



ESPN Feature Producer Denny Wolfe (right) gets into the game during hockey practice with the Bayern Rangers at Weiden Ice Rink Sept. 16. (Photo by Capt. Jennifer Dyrzcz, 18th CSSB PAO)



The Bayern Rangers pose for a group photo with ESPN Feature Producer Denny Wolfe during hockey practice at Weiden Ice Rink Sept. 16. (Photo by Capt. Jennifer Dyrz, 18th CSSB PAO)