

# Ft. Hood senior combat aviator to perform Ballet Austin's 'Mother Ginger'

By Mr. Michael M Novogradac (Hood) December 12, 2018



WEST FORT HOOD, Texas -- A senior Army combat aviator will play "Mother Ginger" in the 56th annual performance of Ballet Austin's "The Nutcracker" Dec. 16 at 2 p.m. at the Long Performing Arts Center, Austin, Texas.

Col. Christopher E. Albus, deputy commander and chief of staff of the U.S. Army Operational Test Command (USAOTC), will help celebrate Texas' longest running production of its kind.

Albus shipped off to Army basic combat training during August 1984, starting out as an enlisted Infantryman, earning the Expert Infantryman's Badge and achieving the rank of sergeant.

After his initial four-year enlistment, he was awarded an Army ROTC scholarship from the University of Massachusetts, which set the stage for commissioning as an Army aviation officer and Blackhawk helicopter pilot.

"I know nothing about 'The Nutcracker,' 'Mother Ginger,' or the ballet," he said.

Backtracking a bit, he quickly added, "I've known it's been a Christmas tradition since I was a little kid, but I don't know anything about it."

He has served multiple stretches of combat duty in Afghanistan and Iraq with hundreds of combat flight hours under his belt, performing medical casualty evacuations, air assault movements of combat troops from one area to another, and a variety of security-type missions.

Albus has some minor theater experience worth mentioning.

"On an assignment in Washington D.C. -- once when I was a geographical bachelor -- I volunteered at a community theater," he explained.

"I served as an usher. That is my only experience with theater."

As his theater experience evolves, for three short minutes Albus will trade in his qualification badges and medals -- which include the Combat Action Badge, Master Aviator's Badge, Air Assault Badge, Senior Parachutist Badge and Ranger Tab -- while performing his "Mother Ginger" mission.

"It's an honor knowing I am able to represent the Army with my family there, especially during the holiday season," he said.

With civilian audiences like those in Austin giving support to Soldiers all the time, Ballet Austin is glad to have Albus perform.

"While Col. Albus may be new to the world of dance and theater, his military experience around the world as a combat veteran and Blackhawk helicopter pilot has more than prepared him for the assignment ahead!" said Ballet Austin Executive Director Cookie Ruiz.

Beginning in 2004, former Vice Chief of Staff of the Army Gen. Peter W. Chiarelli's wife, Beth, was the first Fort Hood VIP to play the part while Chiarelli was the 1st Cavalry Division commander.

Since 2005, various USAOTC leaders, to include commanding generals, command sergeants major, and chiefs of staff have participated in the sold-out performances.

The show features the live accompaniment of the Austin Symphony Orchestra.

Ballet Austin is located at the Long Center, 701 W. Riverside Drive, Austin 78704.

For more information on "The Nutcracker" and "Mother Ginger," go to <https://balletaustin.org/performances/thenutcracker2018>.

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As the Army's only independent operational tester, the U.S. Army Operational Test Command at Fort Hood, Texas, tests Army, joint, and multi-service warfighting systems in realistic operational environments, using typical Soldiers to determine whether the systems are effective, suitable, and survivable. USAOTC is required by public law to test major systems before they are fielded to its ultimate customer -- the American Soldier.