



The graduation class of 2013 at West Point Military Academy stand during ceremonies in May in a light drizzle.

2nd Lt. Tyler Sutherland becomes second person from Liberal to graduate from West Point

By ROBERT PIERCE

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Before May 25, in the 125-year history of Liberal, only one person from the Seward County community had graduated from the West Point Military Academy in New York.

On that date, Tyler Sutherland became the second from Liberal to take part in the final ceremony at the Army's premier post. In addition, Sutherland, who was a salutatorian when he graduated from Liberal High School, was highly ranked among his many fellow cadets.

“There was 1,067 kids, and he graduated 86th – top 8 percent,” said mother Tammy Sutherland-Abbott.

As is the case with all graduating cadets, Sutherland became a second lieutenant, and he is now the operations officer for the Second Regiment of his class.



“West Point has about 4,400 kids, and they’re divided into four regiments,” Sutherland-Abbott said. “He was the regimental operations officer for the second one.”

The final class of just more than 1,000 Army cadets had been dwindled down over four years from an initial 11,000 that applied with Sutherland in 2009, making his class rank even better.

“So he actually was 86th out of 11,000 kids,” Sutherland-Abbott said.

The mother added her son took part in a variety of sports while at the academy.

“When he first went to West Point, he was on the wrestling team,” she said. “He wrestled the first year. The second year, he was on the boxing team.”

Starting with his third year, Sutherland began concentrating more on the military side of his duty, becoming a first sergeant to a company of cadets, something Sutherland-Abbott said took much of her son's time.

"West Point's like a three-legged chair," she said. "You have military, academics and physical fitness. All of those comprise who you are with your grades. His third year, he decided he was going to devote more of his time to the military since that's what his life is going to be. That's when he was selected to be a first sergeant of a company, and his senior year was when he became a regimental operations officer."

Sutherland-Abbott said her son's interest in the military began during his sophomore year at LHS.

"Every year, one sophomore is chosen from Liberal High School to go to the state Hugh O'Brian Leadership Conference," she said. "He went to that, and he really liked that. He got nominated to go to the national conference. It was in Washington, D.C. There was a cadet who had already graduated from West Point. This lady talked about West Point, and that's when he really decided he liked it."

It was not until later that the family would find out about Sutherland's historic tie to Liberal.

"We didn't know anything about it at the time," Sutherland-Abbott said. "We didn't have any idea. He was already at West Point. I don't even remember how we found out that Mr. Moore had graduated out there."

A large part of Sutherland's time at West Point was spent studying nuclear engineering, and his high standing in the class allows him to choose his specialty. Sutherland-Abbott said the local cadet has chosen to stay in the engineering field.

Currently, the Liberal soldier is at Fort Leonard Wood, Mo., attending the Basic Officer

Leadership Conference. Sutherland will be there until December, when he will report to Fort Riley.

Sutherland-Abbott, a member of the USD No. 480 Board of Education, said having her son graduate from West Point means a lot for the school district and the community as a whole.

“Being on the school board, I feel we have no excuse,” she said. “This is a boy when he was not even 2 years old, I moved to Liberal, and it’s been our home ever since. Every aspect of his education, except for learning how to walk, has been through Liberal’s schools. To me, there is no excuse. Every child has the opportunity that Tyler had whether they choose to maximize it or not. I believe they have the opportunity because I’ve seen it first hand.”

In addition to his high rank in his West Point class, Sutherland had some other high accomplishments, including teaming up with a fellow cadet to develop the ISIS Delayed Neutron Detection System.

“What it does, it’s part of our Defense Threat Reduction, and they were awarded this from the Nuclear Engineering Conference,” Sutherland-Abbott said. “He had to go to Boston for a weekend.”

Since his graduation, Sutherland has done two internships at Pantex, and officials with the nuclear weapons facility have invited him to return to the plant following his military service.

Sutherland even got to take part in a ceremony with a Major League Baseball team.

“The New York Yankees did a demo exhibition game with the West Point baseball team,” Sutherland said. “Because Tyler was the regimental officer, he was instrumental in doing the flag ceremony. I think there’s about 70 to 90 cadets that hold the flag out. They were invited to Yankee Stadium the next day to do the same thing. They got to hang out with the Yankees and go to the game.”

## **Sutherland reaches lofty heights**

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In spite of all her son's accomplishments, Sutherland-Abbott said the young soldier remains quite grounded.

"He's pretty humbled," she said.