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*Happy Holidays &
Best of Luck in
2010*

FEATURES

December 2009 | Issue 6

03

The Adjutant General's Column

04

Taking ownership in Warriors sets State apart

05

OSU hosts deployment ceremony for 1-45th ADT

06

Oklahoma Guardsmen eligible for stop-loss pay

07

Oklahoma Guardsman exemplifies 'Citizen-Soldier'

08

DoD to supply H1N1 vaccine to National Guard

09

1st Bn, 179th Inf leads the way with top Soldiers

10

Former Oklahoma TAG inducted into Military Hall of Fame



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OFFICE OF THE ADJUTANT GENERAL

It's hard to believe, but another year has come to pass and what a year it has been.

We have seen the return of the 45th FIRES Brigade from a successful tour in Iraq and Kuwait. Once again the Oklahoma Redlegs demonstrated their versatility as they adapted to a variety of missions, not one of which had anything to do with artillery.

Numerous members of the FIRES Brigade distinguished themselves as 46 received the Combat Action Badge, two received the Purple Heart and two dozen received the Bronze Star.

We also saw the reintegration of more than 2,600 members of the 45th Infantry Brigade Combat Team back into their home units. As you may remember, the 45th IBCT returned from Iraq in October of 2008 after more than eight months in country conducting an array of missions ranging from detainee operations to running the International Zone in Baghdad.

In July the Brigade conducted an extremely successful Annual Training period at Camp Gruber and Fort Chaffee. Due to their deployment, many of the 45th's Soldiers had not worked in their military occupation for nearly two

years, but to see them in action you wouldn't know it.

The 90th Troop Command has seen three units deploy this year. In January the 145th Mobile Public Affairs Detachment and the

live stock production and improve food handling techniques.

As we move toward 2010, I think it is safe to say that the coming year is sure to bring about its own set of unique challenges and exciting events.

Key among the upcoming events is the Oklahoma Salute to the Vietnam Veteran which is scheduled for July 2-4 in Tulsa, Oklahoma City and Norman. The event will be part of Oklahoma Governor Brad Henry's "Year of the Vietnam Veteran" and will give our Vietnam Veterans the homecoming they never received. Scheduled events include live concerts, memorial services, motorcycle rides and reunion events.

As we say goodbye to 2009, I would like to thank every Soldier and Airman, family member and friend

who make the Oklahoma National Guard the great institution that it is. Together we can continue to make a positive impact on our communities, our nation and the world.

God bless you all and have a happy and safe holiday season.



Embedded Training Team deployed to Iraq and Afghanistan respectively. Both units are due back in Oklahoma next month. In October the 1-45th Agri-business Development Team moved to their post-mobilization site at Camp Atterbury, Ind., where they will complete their post-mob training before deploying to Afghanistan. While in Afghanistan, the ADT will work with local farmers and ranchers to increase crop and

MYLES L. DEERING
MAJOR GENERAL, OKARNG
THE ADJUTANT GENERAL

Taking ownership in Warriors sets State apart

Story by Sgt. 1st Class Darren D. Heusel Joint Force Headquarters Public Affairs

By now, surely every U.S. state, territory and the District of Columbia has implemented some form of Recruit Sustainment Program as directed by Maj. Gen. Raymond W. Carpenter, acting director of the Army National Guard.

The objective of the program is to reduce the overall training pipeline loss by ensuring RSP Warriors are physically fit, mentally prepared and administratively correct to successfully complete their basic training and become qualified in their Military Occupational Specialty.

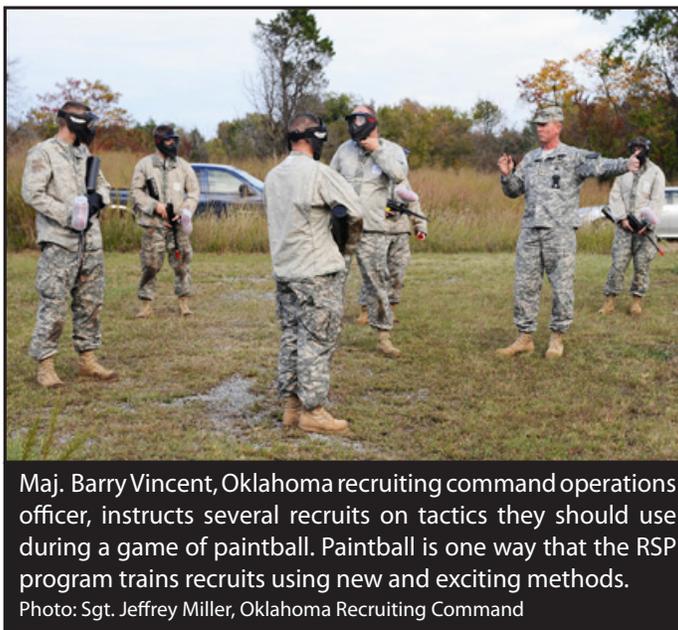
Over the course of the program, RSP cadre members ensure the program's goals are met by instilling new recruits with the Warrior skills required to successfully return to their units ready to deploy in support of the Army National Guard mission.

At the completion of the program, recruits will have experienced everything they might encounter through the first three weeks of basic training and have realistic expectations of what they are about to undergo. What's more, the Warrior Ethos will have been engrained and they will embody the Army Values.

Since its inception in 2006, Oklahoma's program has always been in line with the desired endstate as outlined by Carpenter.

But what has set the Oklahoma Army National Guard apart from other states, according to Lt. Col. Curtis Bohlman, commander of Oklahoma's Recruiting and Retention program which oversees the RSP, is that his recruiters have taken ownership of their RSP Warriors throughout the entire process.

"Back in the old days, recruits would report for one non-prior service weekend to receive some basic military instruction in rank structure, drill and ceremony and the like," said Bohlman. "Then, they would report to their unit of assignment and, in some cases, get cast aside until it was time for them to report to basic training.



Maj. Barry Vincent, Oklahoma recruiting command operations officer, instructs several recruits on tactics they should use during a game of paintball. Paintball is one way that the RSP program trains recruits using new and exciting methods.
Photo: Sgt. Jeffrey Miller, Oklahoma Recruiting Command

"Now, with the advent of the Recruit Sustainment Program, our recruiters are involved in the process from start to finish. We'll be involved from the time the recruiter first makes contact with a prospective Soldier until we do the battle handoff with their new unit of assignment. Not all states do that."

The results have been extremely positive, said Bohlman, as is evidenced by the increasing number of Citizen-Soldiers who have completed the program.

"By becoming personally involved with these RSP Warriors and implementing some fun and meaningful training throughout the entire process, I believe we've helped to reduce the culture shock and prepare these young men and women for what lies ahead," said

Bohlman, whose recruiters operate out of eight locations across the state including Sand Springs, Owasso, McAlester, Lexington, Duncan, Enid, Midwest City and Oklahoma City.

Bohlman went on to say he believes most drill sergeants would agree the preparation is paying off, with his RSP Warriors arriving to basic training more prepared to handle the situation.

In Oklahoma's case, the proof is in the pudding, with many of the current graduates having earned the title of Distinguished Honor Graduate during their Advanced Individual Training or earning a slot in a specialized school mostly reserved for the active duty component.

Pvt. Teneisha Baker, 18, recently returned to Oklahoma City after being named the Distinguished Honor Graduate at AIT and credits the RSP program for her success.

"I think it's a great program," said Baker, who attends Oklahoma State University and will soon join her parent unit, the 1345th Transportation Company out of Midwest City, Okla. "It puts the National Guard Soldiers a step ahead at basic. Whenever our drill sergeants would bark out an order, we knew exactly what to do while everyone else would be running around like a chicken with their head cut off."

As far as the RSP is concerned, Baker said, "I think it's a great program for getting Soldiers prepared to ship out. The things I learned here set the foundation for my entire career."

Baker said she joined the OKARNG primarily because of her 2-year-old

Continued on page 11

OSU hosts deployment ceremony for 1-45th ADT

Story by Staff Sgt. Larissa Copeland, 145th Mobile Public Affairs Detachment, Oklahoma Army National Guard

More than 60 members of the Oklahoma Army National Guard's 1st of the 45th Agri-business Development Team were honored with a departure ceremony Sunday, October 25th, at the Wes Watkins Center on the Oklahoma State University's campus in Stillwater.

After being escorted into town from Oklahoma City by the Patriot Guard motorcyclists, the deploying Soldiers marched into the auditorium to the cheers and standing ovation of the audience, as the Westminster Pipe Band opened the ceremony with a celebratory performance.

Addressing the deploying Soldiers and the large crowd of family and friends, The Adjutant General of Oklahoma, Maj. Gen. Myles Deering, offered words of encouragement and support for the mission.

"I don't know of a time when I've been more proud of a group of Soldiers than I am today. They have a unique role. They'll share skills and expertise acquired through their hobbies, profession and upbringing in the civilian world. They are the essence of a citizen-soldier."

Deering told the troops they are ambassadors for the United States and also for the state of Oklahoma.

"Where Oklahoman's go, we leave an indelible mark – a mark of caring."

The team partnered with OSU in their preparations to assist the Afghans in enhancing agricultural development operations and to help them become self-sufficient.

The university provided subject matter experts for the team's

agriculture training and will provide reach-back capabilities for any problems they encounter while performing their mission.

Dr. Robert Whitson, vice-president, dean and director of the Agriculture Sciences and Natural Resources Division at OSU, said he admired the unit and looked



Members of the 1-45th ADT stand during the opening of their deployment ceremony at Oklahoma State University in Stillwater, Okla.

Photo: 145th Mobile Public Affairs Detachment

forward to working with them in the future.

"We're proud that we'll have a continuing role while you're in Afghanistan, said Whitson. "There's no way we could have prepared you for everything you will encounter and we look forward to providing future input. And we'll be here when you return."

Master of Ceremonies, Lt. Col. John Altebaumer, who incidentally will be deploying for the operation's next rotation in 2010 as an agriculture team leader and whose wife, Sgt. 1st Class Elizabeth Altebaumer, is on this current mission in the poultry section, thanked OSU for all their assistance in preparing them for mission success, now and in the future.

Col. Amos "Mike" Chase, commander of the ADT, also addressed the families in attendance.

"I want to say thanks to you for loaning me your Soldier, your family member, for a year and we look forward to a great homecoming with you all once our mission is complete."

Chase then presented each of the Soldiers with a tomahawk to keep and maintain during the deployment.

He explained that the tomahawk is a Native American all-purpose instrument that was used as a tool and a weapon and was set down during times of peace talks and conference,

"It's an honor to offer you a symbolic piece of the Oklahoma Army National Guard's motto 'Ready in Peacetime and War,' to take with you on

this mission," said Chase.

The 1-45 ADT, based out of Oklahoma City, is the first unit of its kind for the Oklahoma Army National Guard and was created for this specific mission.

It is comprised of Soldiers from all across Oklahoma who will use their military training, in addition to experience or education acquired in their civilian lives in agricultural fields such as farming, pest management, soil management, horticulture, veterinary care and marketing.

The 1-45 ADT will leave in December, spending a brief mobilization period at Camp Atterbury, Ind., before deploying to Paktya Province, Afghanistan, for one year.

Oklahoma Guardsmen eligible for stop-loss pay

Story by Capt. Geoff Legler, Oklahoma Army National Guard Office of Public Affairs

Oklahoma Guardsmen who were retained by the military under a "stop-loss" have 12 months to apply for the special \$500 per month entitlement authorized by Congress earlier this year.

More than 200 current and former Oklahoma Guardsmen may qualify for payment.

Effective Oct. 21, the Department of Defense will compensate Soldiers and Airmen for each month, or portion of a month, they were retained on active duty beyond their contracted separation or voluntary retirement date.

Claims must be submitted between Oct. 21, 2009, and Oct. 21, 2010.

Payments are retroactive to Sept. 11, 2001, and cover involuntary service performed through Sept. 30, 2009.

Guardsmen who have received regular stop-loss pay for service performed after Oct. 1, 2008, will be compensated only if they were in stop-loss status before that date.

Guardsmen must provide documented proof they were stop-lossed with their claim, according to a Defense Department news release.

The retroactive compensation will be paid lump sum for the months served in stop-loss status.

Guardsmen will not receive regular

imposed some form of stop-loss since 9/11, the Army has liberally applied the policy to its active and reserve components over the past nine years, with restrictions initially imposed on Soldiers in priority specialties, and since 2003, on entire units.

The Air Force used stop-loss to reduce attrition during Operation Enduring Freedom in 2001 and 2002 and Operation Iraqi Freedom in 2003.

Current and former Guardsmen qualify for retroactive stop-loss pay if they were retained on active duty beyond:

- A contractual expiration term of service, or ETS, date, or in the case of reservists, their contractual ETS in

the Selected Reserve.

- An approved separation date based on an unqualified resignation or release from active duty or, in the case of reservists, an approved request for transfer to the Individual Ready Reserve.

- An approved retirement based on length of service.



stop-loss pay and retroactive stop-loss pay for the same period.

The Defense Finance and Accounting Service will determine the applicable tax exclusion for retroactive pay that was earned in a combat zone, according to military officials.

While all the armed forces have

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Oklahoma Guardsman exemplifies 'Citizen-Soldier'

Story by Sgt. 1st Class Darren Heusel, Oklahoma Army National Guard Office of Public Affairs

Growing up in the tiny southeastern Oklahoma town of Calera, Staff Sgt. Michael Hearon somehow always knew he'd end up serving his community – and his country – when he grew up.

After all, that's what folks in this Bryan County community of less than 2,000 located in the nation's heartland some 22 miles north of the nearest big city of East Grayson, Texas, do.

And, that's what Hearon's family members have been doing for generations.

Hearon, 37, currently serves as the assistant operations non-commissioned officer for Headquarters Headquarters Troop, 180th Cavalry Regiment, Oklahoma Army National Guard.

The Citizen-Soldier also serves as a captain and training officer on the volunteer fire department in Calera and is a member of the Bryan County EMS in Durant.

"I was born and raised in Calera and graduated from Calera High School," said Hearon, who still resides in Calera along with his wife, Tomila, and the couple's son, Tanner, 13. "My dad was a volunteer fireman and I just always looked up to the older generation and how they volunteered their time.

"Now that I'm older with a family of my own, I just figured someone's got to step up and take their place."

Hearon enlisted in the Oklahoma Army National Guard in 1990. He began his career as a medic with

the 1st Battalion, 180th Infantry and served in many positions until deploying in 2003 to Sinai, Egypt, where he served as a medic and acting medical platoon sergeant.

Upon his return from the Multi-national Force and Observers mission in the Sinai, Hearon was assigned as a scout platoon squad leader for Detachment 1, Headquarters Headquarters

past eight years and began working for the ambulance service in May.

"My training with the fire department and with the ambulance service helps me in the military because we deal with a variety of situations," he said. "It keeps you current in your training and allows you to deal with a number of stressful situations at one time."

Hearon said he is able to work for the ambulance at least one day a week because he works four, 10-hour days as his unit's operations NCO.

"I try to fill in wherever I can, primarily to keep my skills up to date and to help me in my military career," he said. "As a result, if we experience a mass casualty event at either job, I feel I'm prepared and more equipped to handle it."

Hearon said he's able to balance the two because he has a wife and commander who understand the need for service.

"There are conflicts at times, but my commander allows me the flexibility to respond to emergencies and make the time up later," he said. "My wife is very involved as well and helps out when and where she can.

"In my eyes, it's a win-win situation for the military and the community."

Hearon said his military job is his priority because "it pays the bills." The other, he said, "is what I like to do."



Photo: Sgt. 1st Class Kendall James

Company, 180th Infantry in Atoka.

In 2006, Hearon deployed to Afghanistan to help provide security for the 41st Infantry Battalion Combat Team, Oregon Army National Guard.

In June 2007, Hearon returned to Oklahoma and was assigned as the readiness NCO for HHC 1st Battalion, 180th Infantry, providing rear detachment support for the 45th IBCT's deployment to Iraq.

Hearon was assigned to his current position in January. He has been a volunteer fireman for the

Continued on page 8

DoD to supply H1N1 vaccine to National Guard

Story by Army Staff Sgt. Jim Greenhill National Guard Bureau Public Affairs

The Department of Defense has acquired enough doses of the H1N1 flu vaccine to immunize all 460,000 members of the National Guard, officials announced last month.

"The DoD supply will go out to the Guard based on their order through the U.S. Army Medical Materiel Agency," said Army Lt. Col. Dawn Barrowman, the chief of occupational health for the Army National Guard.

All states have ordered the H1N1 injectable vaccine through USAMMA, which is the same way that states order the seasonal flu vaccine.

The Oklahoma Army National Guard will be distributing the H1N1 shots to the brigades in late December and early January. Soldiers who want the vaccination will receive it at January drill.

For Air Guard personnel, the H1N1 injectable vaccine has been ordered through the active duty host base using the same method and guidance as the seasonal flu, said Air Force Capt. Tonya Moser, the chief of medical logistics for the Air National Guard.

Shipments of the DoD vaccine are still scheduled for the second week

of November, but "exact dates will differ from state to state," Brown said.

DoD has acquired 2.7 million doses of the H1N1 vaccine, which may be allocated to active duty members, Reservists, Guardmembers, DoD civilians and essential contractors, according to a DoD memorandum.



Photo: National Guard Bureau

Despite this announcement, Guardmembers are encouraged to get the vaccine through the "most expedient route," Barrowman said. This includes registered H1N1 providers or a HHS source.

If a Soldier does receive a H1N1 vaccine from another source, he is strongly encouraged to provide the documentation to his unit's medical readiness NCO, Barrowman said. This will enable the Army Guard to track

the number of Soldiers who have received the vaccine.

The vaccine will be mandatory for uniformed personnel and highly encouraged for all others, according to a DoD memo. Priority would be given to deployed and deploying forces, new accession sites, including the service academies, and healthcare personnel.

Brown said the vaccine was produced by the same companies that made the seasonal flu vaccine and it went through strict quality assurance inspections by the Food and Drug Administration before it was approved for release to the public.

He emphasized the H1N1 vaccine is the best and most effective way to protect yourself.

Brown also encourages Guard members to take everyday actions to stay healthy, including:

- 1) cover your nose and mouth with a tissue when you cough or sneeze,
- 2) wash your hands often with soap and water, especially after you cough or sneeze,
- 3) avoid touching your eyes, nose or mouth, because germs spread that way, and
- 4) stay home if you get sick.

Citizen Soldier

Continued from Page 7

Hearon said there have been times whenever he's shown up for an emergency wearing his military uniform and had to put his "bunker gear" on alongside the highway.

The biggest thing he's noticed in his nearly 20 years of service is the advancement in technology – going from maps to global positioning

systems and from providing basic first aid to major trauma care.

"The education level of our younger troops is just amazing," he said. "They definitely have a grasp of the new technology that's out there and can dive right in to help as needed."

In his free time, Hearon enjoys serving as a little league basketball referee and is active with his son's

baseball team.

That's whenever he can find time between serving the military and his community.

"With my training in the military, I just felt like it was my responsibility to step up and help the community do whatever I can for the people," he said.

Which is why Hearon exemplifies today's Citizen-Soldier.

1st Bn, 179th Inf leads the way with top Soldiers

Story by Master Sgt. Vincent E. Donaldson, 145th Mobile Public Affairs Detachment

Stepping out ahead of its sister Battalions, the 1st Battalion, 179th Infantry fielded the two best Soldiers in the state for the Non-Commissioned Officer/Soldier of the year competition.

Staff Sgt. Michael R. Slocter, of Alva, a member of Company B, 179th Infantry, and Spc. Larry J. Isbell, of Mustang, belonging to the Scout platoon in Headquarters Company, 179th Infantry, bested the field of seven competitors from the 45th Infantry Combat Team, 1st Battalion, 189th Regional Training Institute, Camp Gruber Training Site, 1345th Transportation Company and 120th Fuel Support Company (HIMARS).

According to State Command Sgt. Maj. Steve Jensen, this is the first cycle of Soldier of the year competition since 2006, as the 45th Infantry Brigade Combat Team's deployment to Iraq in 2007-2008, the largest since the Korean Conflict, put all such events on hold. "We are bringing in the best of the best NCO's and Soldiers within the major subordinate commands in the Oklahoma Army National Guard. They are tested in the field with the execution of Soldier tasks, then in skill knowledge before a board of

Sergeants Major."

"I'm not real intimidated by officers," said Spc. Isbell, "but Sergeants Major just have these eyes of 20 plus years of experience that just beat down on you. It's all about training, they run the show and make it happen. I hold Sergeants Major in high regard and at this level, with Sergeant Major Jensen and the highest Command Sergeants Major in the Guard, it can be a bit intimidating, because of the caliber of the board. They did get the best out of me, which is what a Sergeants Major is supposed to do."

Arriving on the afternoon before the competition was due to begin, the group prepped for the board and rested for the Army Physical Fitness Test (APFT) the next morning. The following morning, Friday, the participants completed their APFT before sunrise.

Upon recovery and breakfast, the group occupied firing range two, zeroed their weapons then racked up their next set of points on the qualification range.

Saturday, the NCO's hit the land navigation range while the Soldiers endured the hot seat under the steady gaze of those eyes of experience Spc. Isbell spoke of, and then switched venues in the afternoon.

Upon completion of the land navigation course, competitors had their warrior tasks tested in a cascade of stations that included, detainee operations, first aid,



Spc. Larry J. Isbell, checks his zero target before the marksmanship portion of the Soldier of the Year competition at Camp Gruber, Okla. Isbell was later named as the Soldier of the Year for 2009.

Photo: Master Sgt. Vincent Donaldson, 145th Mobile Public Affairs Detachment



Staff Sgt. Michael R. Slocter, navigates his way through a compass course at Camp Gruber, Okla., during the Oklahoma Army National Guard's Soldier of the Year Competition for 2009. Slocter was later named as the NCO of the Year for 2009.

Photo: Master Sgt. Vincent Donaldson, 145th Mobile Public Affairs Detachment

nuclear biological contamination and calling in a nine-line evacuation report. When the dust had settled and the sun set, only awards awaited, both victorious and vanquished.

"All receive Oklahoma Commendation metals," said Jensen. "The winners will receive the Oklahoma Meritorious Service Ribbon. Each will receive a certificate of excellence from me. Each winner will be coined by the Adjutant General, and be presented with a Soldier of the Year plaque. The recruiting command also provided excellent awards to include a high quality computer brief case," he said. "I think all will be proud of what was accomplished and what they went home with."

"It's a great honor to represent the state as the best NCO" said two time deployed veteran Staff Sgt. Slocter, "I've learned a lot from the competition, because your basically getting into the file folders of your brain and pulling out knowledge not often used. You kind of color in the map, but it gives you the edge as you become the subject matter expert

Continued on page 13

Former Oklahoma TAG inducted into Military Hall of Fame

Story by Maj. Lindy I. White, Oklahoma Army National Guard Office of Public Affairs

On a day that recognizes past and current military Servicemembers, Oklahoma native Lt. Gen. Harry M. Wyatt, III received the Maj. Gen. Douglas O. Dollar Distinguished Service Award and an induction into the Oklahoma Military Hall of Fame.

Lt. Gen. Wyatt currently serves as Director, of the Air National Guard in Washington, DC. Prior to this, he served from Jan. 2003 to Jan. 2009 as the 26th adjutant general for the State of Oklahoma.

"I had the honor and privilege of leading the Army and Air National Guard here in Oklahoma and appreciate any opportunity to come back and visit," Wyatt said.

The Oklahoma Military Heritage Foundation, sponsor of the Military Hall of Fame hosted its 10th Annual Banquet and Induction Ceremony on the campus of Oklahoma Christian University (OCU) in Edmond. The Hall of Fame is housed at the Academy of Leadership and Liberty and inducted nine other recipients to the Hall of Fame.

"As I listen to the biographies of the other inductees, I have to wonder what I'm doing here," said Wyatt humbly. "Some gave their lives... I thank the Oklahoma Military Heritage Foundation and Hall of Fame for hosting the banquet and ceremony and commemorating the acts of heroism to those who gave their lives."

Wyatt obtained a bachelor's degree in Business Administration from Southern Methodist University in Dallas. He then earned his Juris



Lt. Gen. Harry M. Wyatt, III, gives a speech after receiving the Maj. Gen. Douglas O. Dollar award and being inducted into the Oklahoma Military Hall of Fame.

Photo: Sgt. 1st Class Kendall James, Oklahoma Army National Guard Office of Visual Information

Doctorate at the University of Tulsa in 1980.

Wyatt grew up in Stillwater and joined the U.S. Air Force in June of 1971 and completed pilot training

in 1973. He is a command pilot with over 3,000 hours and is qualified to fly a number of aircraft.

In his current position as Director, Air National Guard, Wyatt is responsible for formulating, developing and coordinating all plans, policies and programs affecting more than 106,800 Air Guard personnel in more than 88 flying wings and 200 geographically separated units throughout the United States, District of Columbia, Puerto Rico, Guam and the Virgin Islands.

When asking Wyatt's parents about his position in Washington, DC, his mother Billy and father Harry Jr. agreed, "We are so proud of him, but it's because he is well qualified, loves to serve and loves the United States."

Wyatt has received multiple military decorations to include the Legion of Merit and Meritorious Service Medal. He is a member of several civic and veterans organizations to include the Rotary Club of Vinita, Oklahoma and the Dale Pierce Post 40 of the American Legion, Vinita, Okla. He is also a member of the Oklahoma Bar Association.

In addition to Wyatt, three other former Oklahoma Guardsmen were inducted to the Hall of Fame. Maj. Gen. Teddy Hollis Sanford and Brig. Gen. George M. Donovan (both deceased) served with the 45th Infantry Division. Col. Cyril Richard Rescorla (deceased) served as a Training Officer for the Officer Candidate School with the Oklahoma Army National Guard.



Lt. Gen. Harry M. Wyatt, III receives his induction from Maj. Gen. (Ret.) Douglas O. Dollar during ceremonies held at Oklahoma Christian University in Edmond, Okla.

Photo: Sgt. 1st Class Kendall James, Oklahoma Army National Guard, Office of Visual Information

Warriors

Continued from Page 4

son, Jordan.

"I had to start thinking about his future and as rough as the economy was looking, I needed to make sure I had something stable to ensure he was taken care of," she said. "There's really nothing else out there that offers the opportunities the Guard has to offer when it comes to education and promotions."

Baker went on to say she thinks the National Guard is a great opportunity for anyone seeking to improve their life.

"To me, (the Guard) is like a win-win," she said. "I'm getting to go to school and making some extra money in the process. I can see myself making this a career. I like the opportunities the Guard provides long-term."

Pvt. Matthew Liao, 19, of Edmond, Okla., was so high speed when he left the RSP in June that he requested a slot to jump school after AIT and was one of a handful of National Guard Soldiers to be selected.

"When I was a little kid, I always wanted to join the military," said Liao, who will soon be linking up with his unit, the 180th Cavalry Scout Troop out of Shawnee, Okla. "When I went away to college, the urge kind of went away. But once I got to basic, it changed my whole outlook."

Liao, who like Baker also joined the Guard to help pay for college, said the RSP started out slow at first, but then got a lot better once it progressed.

"As you get closer to your ship date, (the training) gets more intense," he said. "The RSP starts people to thinking about what they can expect in basic and it keeps their interest throughout."

Liao added he thinks the Guard has made tremendous strides with its RSP and is sending recruits off to basic ready to meet the challenges that lie ahead.

"I know in my basic training and AIT classes, both honor grads were from the National Guard," he said. "What it really comes down to is self-discipline. I'm happy about the fact they're stressing battle buddy teams – having someone with you all the time. To me, they're training you for combat and to work as a team...it all goes back to that old adage that two

timed a lot, I can tell you that. We did a lot of pull ups...We listened to our (instructors) a lot on how to land using the five points of contact. We had to do five jumps to graduate.

"I know how fortunate I am to have received a slot and I wish I could be going to a unit where I could use those skills. But I guess I'll always have those skills to fall back on in the event I ever need them."

Sgt. Cody Caywood, 24, shipper coordinator and training noncommissioned officer with the 90th Troop Command RSP in Oklahoma City, recruited and shipped both Baker and Liao.

"Baker definitely surprised me," Caywood said. "Especially after coming to us off the street with no formal military background and then to go downrange and get honor grad."

"Some kids come back from AIT and still don't have that military bearing locked in, but that's not the case with either one of these

Soldiers...You won't hear the word 'yeah' coming from either of one of them."

Baker said he knew from the day Liao left for basic training he was going to succeed.

"He is just so disciplined and one of the first to always volunteer," he said. "While he was here, he was always talking about wanting to go airborne. He runs a five and a half minute mile and is a PT animal."

Baker went on to say the RSP is a great program and continues to make positive strides.

"When I look at how it was when I went to basic, I didn't know anything," he said. "This is a great program..."



Members of the RSP conduct physical training during a drill weekend in November.

Photo: Sgt. 1st Class Kendall James, Oklahoma National Guard Office of Visual Information

heads are better than one."

As for his acceptance to jump school, Liao said he had to be persistent, another quality he learned during the RSP.

"I kept asking my drill sergeant and he kept telling me it was highly unlikely," he said. "Toward the end of AIT, I and two other Army National Guard Soldiers approached our senior drill sergeant about getting a slot. He sent up a recommendation to our first sergeant and made us an appointment with the National Guard liaison out of Fort Benning, Ga.

"We all went to airborne holdover...after AIT, they shipped us out to airborne school."

As for his recollection of jump school, Liao quipped, "We double

Continued on page 12

Warriors

Continued from Page 11

We try to get (the recruits) squared away as much as possible before they ship – physically, mentally and administratively. When they leave here, they know what to expect and aren't intimidated."

In addition to the interaction between the RSP Warriors and recruiters, Bohlman said another successful aspect of the RSP; at least as far as he's concerned, is the visitor's program.

"We have a pretty descent visitor's program where guests or friends of the RSP Warriors are invited to come out and participate in our training," he said. "We've had some great success in getting others interested in joining."

Bohlman cited a recent example where he had 12 guests show up recently at the Midwest City armory and were training right alongside the others.

"What this does is sort of allow them to try it before they buy it," he said.

He added that he believes the RSP is "the best thing we've done in years to allow our Soldiers to get back from basic and AIT and graduate, rather than come back with some sad story about how they failed."

"I think if you were to ask a drill sergeant, they could tell you who the National Guard Soldiers are as soon as they arrive and I think that's the best thing we can do for our Soldiers," Bohlman said.

Pfc. Christopher Fry, a 17-year-old senior at Del City High School, has his sights set on becoming a military intelligence systems maintainer with the 700th Support Battalion.

That's if he doesn't get an appointment to West Point first.

Fry, whose brother, Cody, 20, is a freshman in the Army ROTC program

at the University of Oklahoma, and whose twin sister, Rebecca, is also considering joining the Guard, is expected to receive word about his appointment to West Point early next year.

"I always knew I wanted to join the military," said Christopher. "When my brother joined the Guard, I knew I wanted to join too. My grandpa served in the Army in Germany during the 1950's and my great-uncle served in the Navy on a submarine in the early 50's."

Christopher said he joined the

Christopher said he heard about West Point from a friend two years ago and thought "it looked really neat." He applied and got turned down so he kept applying and eventually got an interview with a state representative.

"We discussed why I wanted to go to West Point and why I wanted to be a leader," he said. "I was happy with the meeting and the colonel who interviewed me was happy...he just told me to keep up with my PT and continue to get nominations.

"My brother is really happy for me...He's really proud of me."

As for the RSP, Christopher said, "It's great! We do all kinds of stuff – land navigation, troop leading procedures...I'm confident that whatever path I take, I'll be that much more prepared because of the RSP."

Sgt. 1st Class Thomas Schoolcraft, 31, of Del City, recruited Christopher at his alma mater and continues to mentor not only him, but the other RSP Warriors at

the Midwest City armory as well.

One way Schoolcraft and the other cadre members mentor the RSP Warriors is through their real-world experiences.

Schoolcraft, for example, received the Bronze Star with V Device in 2007 while deployed with the 180th Infantry Battalion, 45th Infantry Brigade, Oklahoma Army National Guard, to Afghanistan as an embedded tactical trainer for the Afghan National Army.

He took some shrapnel in the hand from an RPG during an ambush while helping to rescue several local nationals who had earlier come under attack by insurgents.

"A lot of the cadre members are



Members of the RSP face-off during a game of paintball at Camp Gruber, Okla.

Photo: Sgt. Jeffrey Miller, Oklahoma Recruiting Command

Guard after considering all his options and decided it was the best fit for him because of the benefits.

"My brother went through the RSP and told me how well it prepared him for basic training," he said. "I looked at the other branches and what they did to prepare and felt like they wouldn't prepare me as much as the Oklahoma Army National Guard RSP."

Should Christopher not get accepted to West Point, he is scheduled to ship out to Fort Leonard Wood, Mo. for basic in June and to Fort Huachuca, Ariz. for AIT after that.

But from what he's hearing, he's a strong candidate to get into the military academy.

"If I get accepted, I'll leave for West Point in late June," Christopher said.

Continued on page 13

Top Soldiers

Continued from Page 9

now; a skill level I can take back to my unit to share. I consider myself a good NCO, I lead by example. I want my guys to know what I know," he said.

"Competition out there is pretty balanced and very professional now." Jensen noted. "It's good whenever the National Guard can produce a first class representative who can win the whole thing nationwide as the best NCO of the year in competition with the best "big Army" has to offer, as happened in 2008."

That was Staff Sgt. Noyce Merino of the Montana National Guard, who took his state's top NCO honors, won at the regional's, then at the National level and represented the National Guard component at the Army's prestigious "Best Warrior" competition, breaking the stereotype that 'big Army' is somehow better than the "Citizen Soldiers" it so often now calls on for deployments.

According to Jensen, the only "needs improvement," noted for this year's Soldier of the Year cycle was the fact that 12 Soldiers, representing

all the subordinate commands across the state could have participated, but only seven made it to this, the first state level event in three years. Considering that \$25,000 was spent just to support the event, Jensen indicated the participation numbers would be one weakness he would see corrected in next year's iteration.

"With so many layers filtering out the best of the best, there is no reason another Guard Soldier can't be found to again take the Soldier of the Year honors in the final 'big Army' national competition," said Jensen.

Warriors

Continued from Page 12

combat veterans," he said. "Each one of them has a different take (on training) because there's the Army way and then there's the right way when your in the middle of the fight."

"We try to share that experience with the kids and open their eyes a little bit so when they get to basic, they'll have a better idea of what to expect. We don't sugar coat anything."

Schoolcraft said one of the advantages he and the other combat veterans bring to the table is that the RSP Warriors know they're not just teaching from a book.

"We're literally sharing our experiences with them," he said. "That helps them understand that we're truly here to help them. Anyone can read from a book, but being able

to relate real-world experiences helps them understand and prepare much better."

1st Sgt. Terry Thomas, 47, of Del City, is responsible for the RSP in Midwest City and McAlester and has been involved in the program since its inception.

The biggest change he's seen over the past several years is the ship rate has improved dramatically. He's also seen tremendous success in the reduction of pipeline training losses. As a result, the OKARNG is getting more MOS qualified Soldiers and is seeing a higher battle handoff rate.

He said one reason for the improved success is that the cadre members are the RSP Warriors' primary recruiting and retention noncommissioned officers.

"Because of that, the RSP Warriors see their recruiter not only as a

recruiter but as a leader," he said. "There's a lot of ownership in that from start to finish. It also builds a sense of loyalty. In effect, the recruiter becomes the Soldier's first-line leader. While the recruits are here, they're our only focus. We give them our complete undivided attention."

Thomas said he and the RSP leadership across the state are constantly looking at ways to increase their ship rate and make the program better and they won't stop until they are at or near the top.

"What we want to continue to do is provide meaningful, basic training-oriented training," he said. "We want to send these RSP Warriors home tired and fulfilled on Sunday so that they'll want to come back to drill until they ship out and return to us having successfully completed basic and AIT."

Women Veterans of America

Women Veterans of America has established a new chapter in Oklahoma. Meetings are held at 6:30 p.m. the second Monday of each month at the Veterans of Foreign Wars Post 9265, 4605 S. Pennsylvania Ave, Oklahoma City.

The WVA is a non-profit organization that works to ensure the best possible care is given to women veterans by the Department of Veterans Affairs Medical Centers. Among other things, they assist women veterans in obtaining VA benefits; serve on Women Veterans Advisory Committees and get involved in local and national issues pertaining to women veterans, past and present. For more information visit www.wvachapter37OK.org.

