



**Community Relations  
Category C: Special Event**

**14<sup>th</sup> Annual Randy Oler Memorial Operation Toy Drop**

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Nominee: U.S. Army Civil Affairs & Psychological Operations Command (Airborne)  
Public Affairs Office

Army Service Component Command: U.S. Army Reserve Command

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**Introduction**

Nominee: U.S. Army Civil Affairs & Psychological Operations Command (Airborne)  
Public Affairs Office

Army Service Component Command: U.S. Army Reserve Command

Since 1998, the Randy Oler Memorial Operation Toy Drop has combined airborne operations with charitable outreach in order to ensure that every child in the Fort Bragg and surrounding areas would receive a toy during the Holidays.

In 2011, for the first time, Operation Toy Drop collected and distributed toys in eight additional cities across the United States: Los Angeles, Seattle, St. Louis, Dallas, San Antonio, Austin, Baton Rouge, and Staten Island. This was possible by the participation of USACAPOC(A)'s Army Reserve units in those cities taking on the operation in their local communities, reaching out to social services agencies, and finally raising and delivering toys just in time for the holidays.

Hosted by the U.S. Army Reserve Civil Affairs & Psychological Operations Command (Airborne), the operation involves airborne units on Fort Bragg, U.S. Air Force air lift wings from Pope Air Field and three other locations, and jumpmasters from around the world. Paratroopers, who are selected by their unit or are lucky enough to be selected through the second chance lottery, each donate a new unwrapped toy. Paratroopers are then manifested, train and jump with a foreign jumpmaster in order to earn that country's airborne wings. In the airborne community, Operation Toy Drop has become an annual holiday tradition.

The toys collected go to social services agencies, children's homes, hospitals, schools, and to individual families in need of a little assistance during the holidays. The first Toy Drop raised 300 toys distributed in the local area. In 2010, Toy Drop raised 10,900 toys which were delivered throughout North Carolina and selectively throughout the mid-Atlantic and as far west as Tennessee – home of Randy Oler. This year's goal was 12,000 toys.

While the operation has always been open to spectators it was never promoted to the general public. That changed in 2010 with the decision to not only promote Operation Toy Drop as a



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great military family-friendly spectator event but to engage the general public in toy collection efforts and to attend the events main jump day.

Operation Toy Drop collection boxes were distributed throughout the community again this year. Radio and television PSAs were produced with the Carolina Panthers and distributed throughout the Fayetteville and Raleigh media markets and numerous interviews were conducted with local media, particularly radio, to promote toy donations to invite the public to Fort Bragg's Sicily Drop Zone for the main event on Saturday, 10 December 2011. In addition, we partnered with the Fayetteville FireAntz Hockey Team to promote Toy Drop at a series of home games giving fans the opportunity to donate toys at each event.

To help spread the word among paratroopers, we developed a series of posters, flyers, business-card-sized handouts, and a dedicated website. As the operation neared, we unleashed an aggressive media relations program including daily call-ins to local radio stations and national media outreach, the highlight of which was a 3 minute live satellite television interview on Fox&Friends with the USACAPOC(A) CG and Santa Claus – who happened to arrive for the main event on a Blackhawk helicopter early that morning.

In addition to the on-site media operation, Operation Toy Drop was streamed live via the web with two live cameras and numerous interviews with planners, participants, and attendees.

All of these efforts resulted in an extremely successful community relations event for the U.S. Army Civil Affairs & Psychological Operations Command (Airborne), Fort Bragg, and the Army. When all the toys were counted, the event garnered more than 20,000 toys – nearly doubling the previous year's totals. Of note, the event has raised and distributed more toys in the past two years than the previous 12 years combined.



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**Research**

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Public Affairs Office

Army Service Component Command: U.S. Army Reserve Command

According to the U.S. Census Bureau, 23.7% of children in the Fayetteville area live at or below the poverty level. The unemployment rate in this area of North Carolina has held steady at just under 10 percent for the past two years. Nationally, the unemployment rate in the cities where USACAPOC(A)'s Army Reserve units are located hardly fare any better. Social services agencies and non-profit organizations have become at times overburdened with requests for services and support.

Taken together, this data meant that a large number of families with children would be without the means to provide a toy for their children during the important Holiday Season.

Operation Toy Drop was started in 1998 by then Staff Sgt. Randy Oler with those kids in mind. That first year he and a few colleagues on Fort Bragg pulled off a small airborne operation where participants donated toys for the opportunity to jump with a foreign jumpmaster. That year they raised 300 toys. Over the years the operation grew, and some years it raised more than 2,800 toys. However, there was never a shortage of need for toys, and requests from charitable organizations and families always were greater than the number raised. With the economy stalled locally for the past two years, we set our goal in 2010 for 6,000 toys and raised nearly 11,000. In 2011 we set our goal at 12,000 and raised more than 20,000.

Paratroopers had always given generously at Operation Toy Drop with each paratrooper donating a new toy – some more than one – and the toys have always been the latest, most sought-after toys of the year including video game consoles, bikes, and other high-dollar items. Even so, the operation can only sustain so many paratrooper participants. With a finite number of chutes available, we knew we had to expand our scope in order to increase the number of toys we could collect.



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In addition, from our research of previous Operation Toy Drop after-action-reports, media coverage, and discussions with past participants, we learned that while paratroopers had a base level awareness of Operation Toy Drop they did not understand it's importance or impact on the community at large. The community at large had virtually no awareness of Operation Toy Drop.

As such, Maj. Gen. Jeffrey Jacobs, Commanding General U.S. Army Civil Affairs & Psychological Operations Command, approved three strategic communications goals:

Increase public awareness of Operation Toy Drop

Increase paratrooper participation in Operation Toy Drop and their understanding of its importance to readiness and the community

Increase the number of toys collected

Increase opportunities for USACAPOC(A) Army Reserve units in other locations to host Operation Toy Drop events in their local areas



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**Planning**

Nominee: U.S. Army Civil Affairs & Psychological Operations Command (Airborne)  
Public Affairs Office

Army Service Component Command: U.S. Army Reserve Command

We developed a three phase plan that, in each phase, involved command information, public information, and community outreach. The three phases were development, promotion, and execution. The community outreach objectives of Operation Toy Drop:

Increase public awareness of Operation Toy Drop

Increase paratrooper participation in Operation Toy Drop and understanding of its importance to readiness and the community

Increase the number of toys collected

Increase opportunities for USACAPOC(A) Army Reserve units in other locations to host Operation Toy Drop events in their local areas

USACAPOC(A) strategic communication messages throughout Operation Toy Drop where stressed in every phase of planning and with all participants, leaders, and event planners. Strategic communications messages:

“Operation Toy Drop Annual tradition that allows the Airborne to give back to the community that supports us so well.”

“Operation Toy Drop is an important joint and combined airborne operation that brings all three service components of both Army and Air Force together with Allied Countries for combined training that enhances interoperability.”

“Toy Drop’s goal is to both conduct safe, valuable training AND to raise toys for area families in need.”



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“USACAPOC(A), and Army Reserve command, plans, hosts, and executes Operation Toy Drop demonstrating the efficacy of the Operational Reserve.”

Early during the development (Planning) phase, USACAPOC(A) PAO reached out to subordinate elements throughout the United States with an invitation for the Civil Affairs and Psychological Operations units to participate in Operation Toy Drop by collecting toys and delivering them to social services agencies in their local areas. Eight units agreed to participate in Los Angeles, Seattle, Dallas, Austin, San Antonio, Baton Rouge, St. Louis, and Staten Island. Next, USACAPOC(A) PAO identified social services agencies, children’s homes, and similar organizations which service children and families in need or are in crisis. Through targeted phone calls and emails, agencies in each market were identified. Unit representatives and agency contacts were introduced and close liaison were established to identify the number of children serviced and any special needs. The plan to take Toy Drop national was underway.

Concurrently, unified and themed campaign materials were produced including posters, flyers, and business-card-sized-handouts to promote the event among the paratrooper community. These materials were forwarded to each participating unit location for use in Army Reserve centers and in public outreach as applicable.

On Fort Bragg, coordination with the Army and Air Force Exchange System and Morale, Welfare and Recreation garnered permission for Toy Drop volunteers to place posters and flyers on all AAFES and MWR locations on Fort Bragg and Pope Air Force Base.

To further increase awareness among the paratrooper community, announcements were created for Fort Bragg’s TV system.

Since our research showed that most paratroopers had limited understanding of Operation Toy Drop’s history, purpose, and impact, we coordinated with Fort Bragg’s weekly newspaper, *The Paraglide*, to produce five feature stories that ran weekly leading into the operation. The series dissected elements of Operation Toy Drop in order to tell the complete story of the world’s largest combined airborne operation. In addition, a story about Randy Oler and why he created Toy Drop and a final story on the upcoming operation itself would round out the series.



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To aid paratroopers and the public in learning more about Operation Toy Drop we expanded the content on our a vanity URL, [www.optoydrop.net](http://www.optoydrop.net), where the history, photos, maps, FAQs and of course toy donation information could be found. We further decided to link all our online and offline activities together – so that all social media, websites, articles, emails and flyers were all linked back to each other with the website as a central hub for information.

Since we knew there would be a lot of idle time among paratroopers lined up to donate toys, wait for their chance to be manifested, and in between sustained airborne training, we decided to develop an Operation Toy Drop brochure. This document would include a welcome letter from Maj. Gen. Jacobs, a history of the operation, an FAQ, and a list of where the toys ultimately go. This small brochure would increase paratrooper awareness of the importance of Operation Toy Drop as a community outreach opportunity.

The Carolina Panthers, the NFL franchise located in Charlotte, NC, approached us wanting to help with this year's operation. Public service announcements were produced with Carolina players and paratroopers during this phase for both TV and radio throughout the Charlotte, Raleigh and Fayetteville media markets. Produced spots and DJ scripts were included in the packages.

An aggressive media plan was developed to promote the event including the use of two satellite systems with multiple feed windows, two live cameras, multiple to-tape cameras, and still photography support to ensure wide coverage of all aspects of toy collection; all elements of the airborne operation to include train-up, aircraft operations, airborne operations and recovery; and toy distribution. The media plan included escorting on-sight media as well as arranging for interviews via the satellite systems throughout the operation.

In addition to utilizing the satellite feeds for media interviews, we decided to stream Operation Toy Drop live via the internet utilizing the feeds and the Defense Imagery and Video Distribution System (DVIDS) website. Interviews and commentary schedule was developed to enhance the viewers understanding of the operation.

The USACAPOC(A) PAO budget for Operation Toy Drop was limited and resources would be executed out of organic capabilities. All materials including posters and flyers would have to be produced within the command utilizing existing resources. USACAPOC(A) PAO organic assets



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included two officers, one broadcast NCO, and four photojournalist. Recognizing the need for additional PA support, USACAPOC(A) PAO coordinated with Army Reserve headquarters for augmentation including two satellite systems with operators.

Phases II (Promotion) and III (Execution) will be detailed in the next section of this entry.

The research, strategic objectives, and phased plan combined to ensure that the 2011 Randy Oler Memorial Operation Toy Drop was not only successful, but exceeded all expectations.



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**Implementation**

Nominee: U.S. Army Civil Affairs & Psychological Operations Command (Airborne)  
Public Affairs Office

Army Service Component Command: U.S. Army Reserve Command

Beginning in June, volunteers from throughout USACAPOC(A) reached out to surrounding communities and spoke with social services agencies, sports organizations, and businesses to determine whether they would partner with Operation Toy Drop in raising awareness among their employees, fans, and customers and whether they would help collect donations of toys to boost the operation's efforts.

More than three dozen businesses and community organizations agreed to host toy collection boxes and promote Operation Toy Drop in the greater Fayetteville, N.C. area. Numerous radio and television stations played Operation Toy Drop public service announcements with three local radio stations running a significant number of interviews and promotions in the weeks leading into the main event.

Units in the other location began toy collection in their Army Reserve centers and continued liaison efforts with the identified social services agencies. Through personal contacts and targeted outreach efforts to service clubs such as the Lions, these efforts resulted in significant toy collection efforts in those local areas and provides a solid foundation for a more broad community relations program for these units.

Once again this year, for the second season, the Fayetteville FireAntz, the local professional hockey team, promoted Operation Toy Drop during their home matches in the weeks leading up to the operation and invited fans to bring toys to the final game before Toy Drop. At that game, the FireAntz delivered the toys to USACAPOC(A) on the ice and played a series of videos produced by USACAPOC(A) PAO to promote attendance at Toy Drop. Through this partnership, another 1,000 toys were raised for area kids.



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For the first time, the Carolina Panthers football team joined Operation Toy Drop to help promote the event. PSAs with Panther players and paratroopers were produced and distributed to TV and radio stations throughout the Charlotte, Raleigh, and Fayetteville areas.

In addition, numerous interviews were conducted with media locally and regionally to promote raise awareness, promote the toy drive, and to invite the public to the main event. In conjunction with this effort, photographs and video from past Operation Toy Drop events were marketed to media throughout the area.

Posters, flyers and handouts produced in the planning were distributed throughout Fort Bragg and the surrounding area raising the “buzz” among the paratrooper community. Staff regularly revisited locations and replaced posters as needed. Staff and volunteers, throughout their regular business, also handed out the business-card-sized flyer to any paratrooper they encountered thus adding additional buzz.

In addition, USACAPOC(A) PAO liaised regularly with the Air Force public affairs officers for the numerous wings participating in the air operations portion of Operation Toy Drop to ensure proper messaging and to ensure that the Air Force personnel actively involved in the operation were included in media activities.

In early December, the team transitioned to the execution phase and actively and aggressively pitched local, regional and national media garnering significant coverage including more than five minutes of live interview time on Fox&Friends via satellite from the drop zone during the main event. Two-dozen media outlets utilized the satellite or phone-in interviews with Operation Toy Drop planners and participants and the USACAPOC(A) PAO team escorted six media outlets on site to include the largest area newspaper the Fayetteville Observer.

In the eight other locations, toy delivery events started the first weekend of December, the Army Reserve unit’s monthly Battle Assemblies, with the first event taking place in San Antonio, Texas. HMMWVs from the 17<sup>th</sup> PSYOP Battalion delivering toys to the Fisher House, the Children’s Shelter, and St. PJ’s Children’s Home in the local area.



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Daily leading up to the main Operation Toy Drop event, interviews were conducted with radio stations throughout the Central Carolina area encouraging toy donations and attendance at the drop zone for the event.

The USACAPOC(A) Facebook and Twitter feeds were refreshed with the Operation Toy Drop logo and fans were invited to change their profile to include the logo and to help spread the word. Daily updates included video clips and photos of past Toy Drop events and the preparations underway. Once the operation commenced, near real-time updates were provided with additional photos and video.

To prepare planners, volunteers, and others working the event for media engagements, USACAPOC(A) PAO distributed consolidated messages and talking points which ensured consistent messaging for the event.

On Friday, December 9, 2011, the toy collection and manifesting day for paratroopers, more than 4,000 paratroopers turned out for the event – each with a toy in hand to donate – for their chance at the 300 parachutes set aside for the second chance lottery. Combined with the 3,700 paratroopers already manifested for the operation, each of whom also must donate a toy, we knew we were well on our way to reaching our 12,000 toy goal. USACAPOC(A) PAO ran a live video feed via DVIDS throughout the day and through aggressive media outreach conducted more than a dozen live interview via satellite and telephone with key leaders and event participants.

More than 2,000 spectators turned out on Saturday, December 10 for the operation's main event – to watch more than 1,500 paratroopers take to the skies over Fort Bragg's Sicily Drop Zone in multiple passes of three to four C130s each. A big hit this year was the arrival of Santa and Mrs. Claus via Blackhawk helicopter early Saturday morning.

In addition to viewing the day-long airborne operation, recovery, and foreign jump wing ceremonies, we provided a rock climbing wall and other activities for the kids. The local country music station, which aggressively promoted Toy Drop in the weeks leading up to the main event, broadcasted live from the drop zone. Most spectators brought additional toys to donate, and, by mid-day, the on-site display alone included nearly 1,200 toys.



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USACAPOC(A) PAO continued the live video feed from the drop zone with two live cameras. The highlight of the effort was a live Fox&Friends satellite interview with USACAPOC(A) Commanding General and Santa. USACAPOC(A) PAO provided significant video and still coverage of all aspects of the operation uploading to DVIDS, Facebook, and targeted media marketing in near real time from the drop zone.

Besides the airborne operation itself, the real work of phase III is toy distribution. Immediately following the airborne operation, toys are sorted and bagged per the needs of the various charities receiving toys.

Volunteers, called elves, from USACAPOC(A) then deliver toys to all the facilities, homes, and institutions before December 24<sup>th</sup>. The effort at Fort Bragg was duplicated by the eight units in Los Angeles, Seattle, Dallas, Austin, San Antonio, Baton Rouge, St. Louis, and Staten Island.

At its conclusion, Operation Toy Drop had raised 20,135 toys – nearly double the original goal – for kids in nine geographic areas who might not otherwise be fortunate to get a new toy for the holidays.

Of noted success is the expansion of Operation Toy Drop into additional communities in 2011. While the publicity in these locations was purposely limited, the success locally for each of these satellite events has laid the foundation for future Toy Drop events as well as expanded community relations programs for each of these Army Reserve units.



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**Evaluation**

Nominee: U.S. Army Civil Affairs & Psychological Operations Command (Airborne)  
Public Affairs Office

Army Service Component Command: U.S. Army Reserve Command

The commander's direction was clear – "Operation Toy Drop is about Soldiers supporting the community, so get the word out to the community and invite them to participate; see if we can expand the operation to involve more of our units." With that direction in hand and goals set to raise more toys than ever before, USACAPOC(A)'s Operation Toy Drop team developed and executed an aggressive community relations and media operations plan that exceeded all expectations.

The 2011 Randy Oler Memorial Operation Toy Drop significantly enhanced the Army's community relations program not only in the Fayetteville area but throughout the country. This is evident in the fact that more than 13,000 toys were donated to the effort by the public. Toy distribution expanded greatly this year with as many toys going to communities outside of the traditional Fayetteville/Fort Bragg area as were collected and distributed locally.

More paratroopers participated in the event than during any previous Operation Toy Drop confirming that this event is the premier holiday event of the Fort Bragg community.

Finally, the ultimate goal of Operation Toy Drop was providing toys for families in need during the Holiday season. While there is never a shortage of need, our goal – thought to be aggressive at the time – of 3,900 toys was significantly exceeded resulting in 10,895 toys being collected and distributed throughout the central Atlantic region.

Sample media coverage:

- Fox&Friends – live 3:00 live interview drop zone
- NBC-17 (Raleigh) – multiple stories and live broadcasts from event
- ABC-7 (Raleigh) – multiple stories and live broadcasts from event
- WKML Radio (Fayetteville) – multiple promotional announcements, DJ reads, and live broadcast from event



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- Fayetteville Observer – two feature articles
- The National Defense (VFW and syndicated) – live interview
- Paraglide – six feature stories
- Numerous online stories including:
  - Blackanthem
  - Dropzone
  - Army.mil
  - ArmyReserve.Army.mil
  - AF.mil

The communication objectives were managed through aggressive pre-event promotions, media engagements during the event, and ensuring that planners and staff were well versed on strategic talking points. These messages were well received and demonstrated in the media coverage of the event.



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**Recommendation**

Nominee: U.S. Army Civil Affairs & Psychological Operations Command (Airborne)  
Public Affairs Office

Army Service Component Command: U.S. Army Reserve Command

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**Supporting Public Affairs Products/Media Coverage**

Nominee: U.S. Army Civil Affairs & Psychological Operations Command (Airborne)  
Public Affairs Office

Army Service Component Command: U.S. Army Reserve Command

## U.S. Army Civil Affairs and Psychological Operations Command (Airborne)

Hometown: Fort Bragg NC US

### Current Personnel:

- Staff Sgt. Felix Fimbres
- Sgt. 1st Class Andy Yoshimura
- Capt. Saska Spinner
- Lt. Col. Gerald Ostlund
- 1st Lt. Scott Madison
- Spc. Kathryn Summerhill
- Staff Sgt. Shariym Wells
- Sgt. 1st Class Matthew Stemon
- Capt. David Chace
- Staff Sgt. Amanda Boersma



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**14th Annual Randy Oler Memorial Operation Toy Drop Delivers**  
 Sr. Airman Jonathon T. Boseman helps set up toys for children of Levine Children's Hospital. The ...  
 Taken: 12.19.2011



**14th Annual Randy Oler Memorial Operation Toy Drop**  
 Staff Sgt. Christina Hipenbecker, primary jumpmaster, leads paratroopers in sustained airborne tr...  
 Taken: 12.10.2011



**Operation Toy Drop**  
 Paratroopers prepare to board their aircraft for the first jump of the day in support of Operatio...  
 Taken: 12.10.2011



**Toy Drop**  
 Santa Claus and Maj. Gen. Jeffrey A. Jacobs prepare for a live interview with Fox and Friends dur...  
 Taken: 12.10.2011



**14th Annual Randy Oler Memorial Operation Toy Drop**  
 Paratroopers load a C-130 during the 14th Annual Operation Randy Oler Operation Toy Drop, Dec. 10...  
 Taken: 12.10.2011

...more images from USACAPOC

★★★★★  
 (647 votes; 2.27)

### News Stories



**14th Annual Randy Oler Operation Toy Drop delivers**  
 As you walk through main entrance of Levine Children's Hospital in Charlotte, N.C. light surrounds you. The hospital's prism design fills you with an

★★★★★  
 (37 votes; 2.95)

## Panthers, Paratroopers, Airmen Visits a Children's Hospital During the Holiday Season



★★★★★  
 (43 votes; 3.02)

### Recent Video



**Panthers, Paratroopers, Airmen Visits a Children's Hospital During the Holiday Season**  
 Soldiers of the U.S. Civil Affairs and Psychological Operations Command (Airborne), Airmen of the 145th Airlift Wing and Carolina Panther players hands toys raised for Operation Toy Drop to children at the Levine Children Hospital in Charlotte, N.C. Soundbites from Dan Connor, Staff Sgt. Tim Frank and 1st Lt. Laurie Hawkins  
 Also available in high definition  
 Taken: 12.19.2011



**14th Annual Randy Oler Memorial Operation Toy Drop B-Roll**  
 B-roll from Sicily Drop Zone for Operation Toy Drop of paratroopers jumping from C-130's. Also available in high definition  
 Taken: 12.10.2011



**14th Annual Randy Oler Memorial Operation Toy Drop B-Roll**  
 B-Roll from the paratroopers getting issued and putting on parachutes, then getting checked, then loading the C-130 at Operation Toy Drop.  
 Also available in high definition  
 Taken: 12.10.2011



**14th Annual Randy Oler Memorial Operation Toy Drop Interview**  
 Maj. Gen. Jeffrey A. Jacobs, commanding general of USACAPOC(A), gives an interview about his first Operation Toy Drop, then an interview on the drop zone right after his jump. Also available in high definition  
 Taken: 12.10.2011



**14th Annual Randy Oler Memorial Operation Toy Drop B-Roll**  
 B-Roll of kids partaking in activities at Sicily Drop Zone for Operation Toy Drop. Also available in high definition  
 Taken: 12.10.2011

...more video from USACAPOC

★★★★★  
 (13 votes; 2.69)

### Recent Audio

**Maj. Gen. Jeffrey Jacobs**  
 Maj. Gen. Jeffrey Jacobs, from Columbia, S.C., talks to a reporter with The Columbia Star about Operation Toy Drop.  
 Taken: 12.19.2011

**Lt. Col. Gerald Ostlund**  
 Lt. Col. Gerald Ostlund from Seattle, Wash. with USACAPOCA talks to a reporter from the The Columbia Star in Columbia, S.C. about Operation Toy Drop.  
 Taken: 12.19.2011

**Lt. Col. Gerald Ostlund**  
 Lt. Col. Gerald Ostlund, from Seattle, Wash., talks to a Gig Harbor Life reporter about his duties as a spokesperson for the Army and their Operation Toy Drop.  
 Taken: 12.14.2011

**Lt. Col. Gerald Ostlund Interview**  
 Lt. Col. Gerald Ostlund talks about his duties and responsibility regarding Operation Toy Drop.  
 Taken: 12.14.2011

**Operation Toy Drop PSA**  
 The 14th Annual Randy Oler Memorial Operation Toy Drop will be on Dec. 9 and 10 at Green Ramp and Sicily Drop Zone on Fort Bragg, N.C.  
 Taken: 11.21.2011

...more audio from USACAPOC

unexpected sense of hope, as the hospital is home to 234 children ranging in age from new born to 18 years old.  
 12.19.11 Story by [Spc. Kathryn Summerhill](#)



**14th Annual Randy Oler Memorial Operation Toy Drop: Paratroopers receive much more than foreign jumpwings at Operation Toy Drop**  
 It was apparent, Dec. 9, at 6 a.m., when the first paratrooper got in line in front of Green Ramp on Pope Field, he wanted the chance to earn himself a pair of foreign jump wings. But the main reason for him was the opportunity to donate a toy to a child this holiday season.

12.14.11 Story by [Staff Sgt. Felix Fimbres](#), [Spc. Kathryn Summerhill](#) and [Staff Sgt. Shariyn Wells](#)



**14th Annual Randy Oler Memorial Operation Toy Drop: A toy's story**  
 Steven Blum, from the 2nd Battalion, 504th Parachute Infantry Regiment, knew exactly what he was looking for when he stepped inside the busy toy store filled with holiday shoppers. As a kid, Blum, who's now a 2nd Lieutenant, loved anything with wheels and headed straight to the large remote control section of the boys' toy area.

12.8.11 Story by [Staff Sgt. Felix Fimbres](#), [Spc. Kathryn Summerhill](#) and [Staff Sgt. Shariyn Wells](#)



**341st Psychological Operations Company soldiers give toys to children**

The 341st Psychological Operations Company arrived like Santa Claus with Humvees full of toys to the Wilford Fisher House located on Lackland Air Force Base in San Antonio, Texas. The first Wilford Fisher House began in 1991, when Fisher was on a business trip and noticed a Sailor who had been sleeping in his car. Fisher asked the man why he was staying in his car and he said he couldn't afford a hotel room so Fisher paid for a room out of his pocket.

12.4.11 Courtesy Story



**14th Annual Randy Oler Memorial Operation Toy Drop: Behind the scenes of the world's largest combined airborne operation (part 4)**  
 Packing a parachute requires the utmost concentration and attention to every single detail, because the U.S. Army parachute riggers are responsible for the

life of every paratrooper who steps out of a plane.

12.1.11 Story by [Staff Sgt. Felix Fimbres](#), [Spc. Kathryn Summerhill](#) and [Staff Sgt. Shariyn Wells](#)

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**09.26.2011**  
 USACAPOC(A) Summer edition 2011



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Wednesday, December 28, 2011

## North Bethesda paratrooper leads Operation Toy Drop

*Paratroopers collect toys, leap from planes*

by Alex Ruoff, Staff Writer

In his time in the U.S. Army, Brig. Gen. Alan Stolte has served on peacekeeping missions in Kosovo, and, as a paratrooper, jumped into action in Kuwait.

But this month Stolte, a North Bethesda resident and the deputy commanding general of the U.S. Army's Civil Affairs and Psychological Operations Command, has a new mission. It's one that will require both his skills as a paratrooper and an officer: Operation Toy Drop.

Operation Toy Drop is a combination toy drive, where service members donate children's toys to social service agencies, and complex non-tactical airborne operation in Fort Bragg, N.C.

Soldiers who donate a toy to the drive are entered into a lottery, the winners of which can participate in a 12-plane simulated jump, this year the largest airborne operation ever undertaken, with 1,200 paratroopers, said Lt. Col. Gerald Ostlund of the U.S. Army Reserve at Fort Bragg.

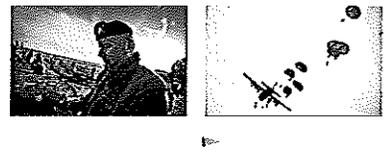
Stolte said although paratroopers can earn their foreign Airborne wings, a medal that many sport for bragging rights, by participating in the operation, there's another reason why the toy drive has continued to expand each year since its inception in 1998.

"Paratroopers like helping people," he said.

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U.S. Army Sgt. Felix R. Fimbres Lt. Col. Gerald Ostlund checks his blackberry while coordinating the media elements participating in Operation Toy Drop at Fort Bragg on Dec. 10 during the 14th Annual Randy Oler Operation Toy Drop, hosted by the U.S. Army Civil Affairs & Psychological Operations Command.



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Foreign Airborne wings are earned when paratroopers take instruction from a non-domestic instructor, Stolte said. The toy drop exercise is done with jump masters — paratrooper instructors — from countries allied with America, such as England and Turkey.

Stolte both will jump and oversee this year's drop, which has gathered about 20,000 toys, almost double last year's total of 11,000, Ostlund said.

Toys will be given to social service organizations and foster homes around Fort Bragg as well as to the Fisher House Foundation, which provides housing for families of service members being treated at military medical centers around the country, he said. These toys will be distributed at the end of this month.

aruoff@gazette.net

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# Operation Toy Drop lands in Fayetteville

Friday, December 09, 2011



TAGS: fort bragg, local/state, gilbert baez

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POPE ARMY AIRFIELD (WTVD) -- Thousands of soldiers lined up at Pope Army Airfield before light Friday morning to make sure all the good boys and girls in the Fort Bragg family have something nice under the tree this Christmas.

From bicycles to action figures, the troops brought presents to donate to the Operation Toy Drop program.

"As an Eagle Scout I've done this kind of thing before when I went out on a toy drive, so I think it's really important so that everyone can have a nice Christmas. Fort Bragg Soldier Spec. Jonathan Maten said.

For the last 14 years, Operation Toy Drop has helped families get toys for their kids on holidays. Last year, more than 10,000 toys were collected and distributed nationwide, and organizers hope to push that number to 15,000 this year.

The Fayetteville community is also on board.

"We've got toys donated by the kids at E. Melvin Honeycutt Elementary School. We got bikes boys and girls toys from all ages. Got the whole truck full of toys with Operation Toy Drop.

"I think it's a very nice program helping the people of Fayetteville. Fort Bragg Capt. Ignacio Martinez said. "It's an honor for us to be here on Fayetteville too."

[Click here for more on the history of how the program got started.](#)

There's something in it for the soldiers too. By taking part, paratroopers are put into a lottery for a chance to earn foreign jump wings from allied soldiers around the world. Eleven allied countries have sent jumpmasters: Cambodia, Canada, Chile, Estonia, Germany, Latvia, the Netherlands, Poland, Thailand, Ukraine, and Uruguay.

"Most of the soldiers are trying to get the Thai Wings because they're the largest and they're really hard to get because Thailand doesn't get here very often. And they're hand embroidered," said Becky Caldwell with Operation Toy Drop.

Fort Bragg Soldier Pfc. Jake Ovitt is one of the lucky ones. His number was called. He'll earn some new wings.

"I actually brought this it's called an Aqua Doodle," Ovitt said. "Magic Markers and it writes only on the paper, which is good for parents so I figured it would be a good toy."

The sponsor is the Army Reserve's U.S. Army Civil Affairs and Psychological Operations Command - headquartered at Fort Bragg. The Air Force Reserve's 440th Airlift Wing is in charge of the airplanes. C-130 cargo airplanes have come from around the United States.

The mass jump takes place at 8 a.m. Saturday on Sicily Drop Zone.

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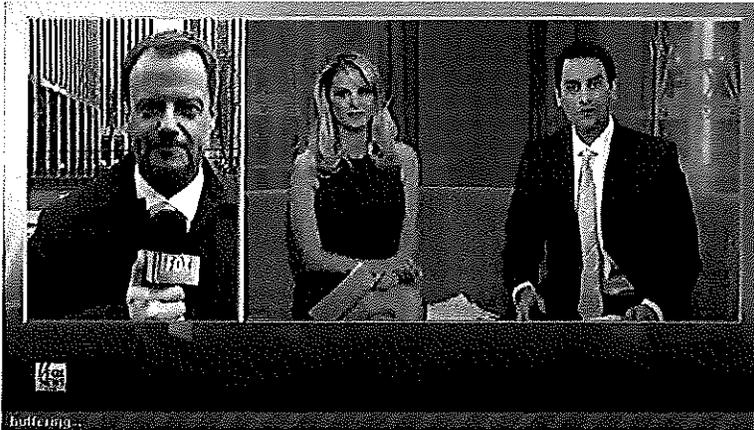
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# Operation Toy Drop

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Dec 10, 2011 - 2:25 - Fort Bragg's holiday tradition to collect and distribute toys to children in need



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News > Operation Toy Drop

## Niagara C-130s support Operation Toy Drop at Fort Bragg

Posted 12/14/2011 Updated 12/14/2011 [Email story](#) [Print story](#)

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by Tech. Sgt. Joseph McKee  
914th Airlift Wing Public Affairs

12/14/2011 - Niagara Falls Air Reserve Station, NY. -- The 914th Airlift Wing here participated in the annual Operation Toy Drop over Fort Bragg, N.C., Dec. 10.

Operation Toy Drop is a week-long, philanthropic project where American and foreign paratroopers stationed at Fort Bragg contribute new, unwrapped toys to be distributed to local children's homes and social service agencies.

The drop is a daytime, non-tactical airborne operation supervised by foreign military jumpmasters - a rare treat for participating U.S. Soldiers who relish the opportunity to earn a foreign nation's "jump wings".

Started in 1998, 2011 marks the first year Operation Toy Drop goes national. Operation Toy Drop is now the largest multi-national airborne operation in the world.

[Click here to see the video.](#)

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The 914th Airlift Wing participates in the annual Operation Toy Drop December 10, 2011, Fort Bragg, NC. Operation Toy Drop is a week-long project where Fort Bragg's paratroopers donate toys to be distributed to local children in need. (U.S. Air Force photo by Tech. Sgt. Joseph McKee)

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## Operation Toy Drop: Troops gather toys for needy children



Staff photo by Andrew Craft [P] click to enlarge

Spc. Robert Creighton, left, donates a toy during Operation Toy Drop on Friday morning at the

**By Michael Futch**  
Staff writer

Barbie was surrounded by a mob of soldiers on Pope Field's Green Ramp Friday morning.

For that matter, so was Ken.

The enduring Mattel toy dolls were among thousands of gifts collected in big cardboard boxes for Fort Bragg's 14th annual Operation Toy Drop. Paratroopers dressed in their ACUs also dropped off Captain America Disco-Launching Shields, MP3 players, basketballs, plush Kissing Simba and Nala Lion King dolls, Transformer Mud Slinger Jeeps, Hot Wheels, Buzz Bee Belt Blaster dart guns and Kid Trax Melody scooters for toddlers.

On this day, the Green Ramp had turned into Toyland.

Sgt. 1st Class Catherine Reese, one of the elves helping to collect the gifts, said one soldier donated a \$250 retail Nintendo DS game console.

This year's goal: 20,000 toys.

The toys will be distributed to 27 organizations, including local children's homes and social service agencies. Those agencies will then dole them out to a cast of underprivileged children, so that they, too, can share in the joy of the Christmas season.

Early Friday morning, more than 2,200 Fort Bragg paratroopers could be found inside a couple of passenger terminals, according to Scott Murray of the 18th Airborne Corps G-3. Half were already on the manifest slated to participate in

the annual parachute jump with jump masters from around the world.

As for the other 1,100?

Those soldiers had one last crack at making the field through an on-site lottery for 300 seats on the aircraft. Whether or not they had secured a spot in one of the eight Air Force C-130s, the troopers were asked to bring a new, unwrapped present for a boy or girl.

Not only did 32-year-old Capt. Robert Riggs bring a shiny new children's bike, but he had wrapped a safety helmet around one of the handlebars.

"I don't want them to hurt themselves," he said with a grin.

Riggs said he would never get this opportunity again. He's only in the 82nd Airborne for a year. Come May, he will become a foreign area officer - a commissioned officer who serves as a regionally focused expert in political-military operations.

The public is invited to watch today's scheduled jump during the main airborne operation. They can also donate toys at that time.

Weather permitting, the first soldiers will land on Sicily Drop Zone before 8 a.m. If today's weather is bad, the first drop will be Sunday.

Like Riggs, Sgt. Christopher Chamberlain already had his seat in the plane. He donated a Little Mermaid neck brace - his children like wearing one while on long trips in the car.

"It's more about the kids," Chamberlain said. "I wouldn't mind having the wings, but it's more about the kids. I have two (aged 3 and 5). Some kids are less fortunate than mine. That's why I'm here."

As for those wings, the 26-year-old Chamberlain was referring to the foreign jump wings that soldiers can add to their array of military badges by participating in the jump. Ten allied countries have sent jumpmasters. Soldiers who jump under the instruction of another country's jumpmaster earn the right to wear that country's airborne wings on their Class A uniform.

"It's more of an honor to be able to wear these wings," Chamberlain said. "They're allowing us to wear their wings."

Sgt. 1st Class Maggie Peppers, 40, was anxious to get her wings. That's why she was carrying a Revell model kit - a Boeing C-17A Globemaster III military transport plane - for some lucky child with patience.

"We're in for Cambodian wings," she said.

Murray, of the 18th Airborne Corps G-3 Air, is a founding member of Operation Toy Drop. He recalled when Sgt. 1st Class Randy Oler, who is credited as the original organizer of the event, told him about an idea he had - toys for kids with an airborne twist.

Seven years ago, Oler died of a heart attack while aboard a C-130 cargo aircraft.

"Last year we raised over 10,000 toys," Murray said. "Toy Drop is always successful. The best thing about this - it shows the heart of the American paratrooper. Some of these guys, they struggle month to month to make ends meet. They're out here with Nintendos, Game Boys. It's giving from the heart."

Staff writer Michael Futch can be reached at [futchm@fayobserver.com](mailto:futchm@fayobserver.com) or 486-3529.

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## Operation Toy Drop to bring 4,000 paratroopers and 20,000 toys to Fort Bragg

FORT BRAGG, N.C. -- More than 4,000 paratroopers will be in the skies Saturday, Dec. 10 around Fort Bragg for Operation Toy Drop.

Operation Toy Drop is a week-long, philanthropic project where Fort Bragg's paratroopers (and visiting paratroopers from across the nation) individually contribute new, unwrapped toys to be distributed to local children's homes and social service agencies.

Despite the project's name, these toys are not "dropped" anywhere except into the arms of deserving children throughout Cumberland County and North Carolina. Because of this, thousands of American children who may have not received a toy from Santa Claus, can now wake up and experience the joy of Christmas.

The drop is actually a daytime, non-tactical airborne operation supervised by foreign military jumpmasters – a rare treat for participating Soldiers who relish the opportunity to earn a foreign nation's "jump wings."

In 2011, the event goes national, and international, as units in California, Washington, Missouri, Texas, New York, and Louisiana have all joined the mission of holiday cheer and will be distributing thousands of toys to their local communities.

The operation brings Army, Air Force, and Allied Countries together for combined training that enhances interoperability.

There will be 53 jumpmasters from 10 countries and the U.S. who will be participating this year: Germany, Canada, Netherlands, Cambodia, Thailand, Uruguay, Ukraine, Poland, Latvia and Chile. Paratroopers earn the wings of the country they jump with.

8 Air Force C-130s also will participate.

The first year, 1998, 550 toys were collected. Last year, OTD distributed nearly 11,000 toys and this year's goal is 20,000 toys.

Masterminded by then-Staff Sgt. Randy Oler in 1998, Operation Toy Drop started as a relatively small-time success backed by some big-time coordination. Oler's dream of incorporating Airborne operations, foreign military jumpmasters and local charities was a tall order, but Oler was never one to shy away from a challenge. He approached his commanding general within the U.S. Army Civil Affairs and Psychological Operations Command with the idea and was given the green light to spearhead the project.

That December, after eight months of planning, USACAPOC(A)'s first annual Operation Toy Drop had been completed on a wing, a prayer, and Oler's handshakes across several organizations. It was small, and very few toys had actually been raised – but it was a start, and from that point on Oler had a foundation to build on.

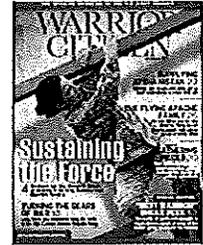
Over the following years, Operation Toy Drop expanded to include aircraft support from Pope Air Force Base's 43rd Airlift Wing, and welcomed the participation of Soldiers from Fort Bragg's XVIII Airborne Corps and 82nd Airborne Division. These Soldiers' enthusiasm to participate in the budding holiday tradition greatly outweighed the number of jump slots available. With limited space on the planes, the project's organizers arranged to draw names of participating Soldiers at random to fill the slots. The name drawing has become one of the main spectacles of Operation Toy Drop, where hundreds of Soldiers crowd together for the chance to hear their ticket number called, no matter how long the wait.

Oler had warned his colleagues that he might not be around for what would have been his seventh year running Operation Toy Drop. Sadly, he was right, but not due to any relocation orders. On April 20th, 2004, Sgt. 1st Class Randall R. Oler suffered a heart attack while



Cambodian and American jumpmasters, pictured here working together, along with jumpmasters from eight other nations, gathered at Pope Army Air Field, N.C., to familiarize themselves with the T-11 parachute in anticipation for the 14th Annual Randy Oler Memorial Operation Toy Drop, which officially kicks off Dec. 9, 2011 at Fort Bragg, N.C. Last year, donations from Fort Bragg paratroopers and their families helped contribute to the more than 10,000 toys which were distributed to children in need around the local Fort Bragg community.

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performing jumpmaster duties aboard a C-130 aircraft. At 43 years old, Oler was pronounced dead at Womack Army Medical Center. The Tennessee native had joined the Army in 1979 as an Infantryman, spending time in Ranger and Special Forces battalions throughout his career, and had deployed in support of Operations Desert Storm, Provide Comfort and Joint Endeavor. In 1995, he joined USACAPOC(A) to become a Civil Affairs specialist.

Oler's humanitarian spirit built Operation Toy Drop from the ground up, and it's only appropriate that the following December, his dream-turned-reality was dubbed the Randy Oler Memorial Operation Toy Drop by those who had worked so closely with him over the years. The void left by Oler's death was a difficult one to fill -- Oler had run the operation from memory for six years. With no written notes to work from, key players scrambled to make the connections that Oler had worked from his head over the previous years.

Operation Toy Drop has collected and distributed over 35,000 toys -- from bikes, to dolls, to video game systems -- for local families and children in need.

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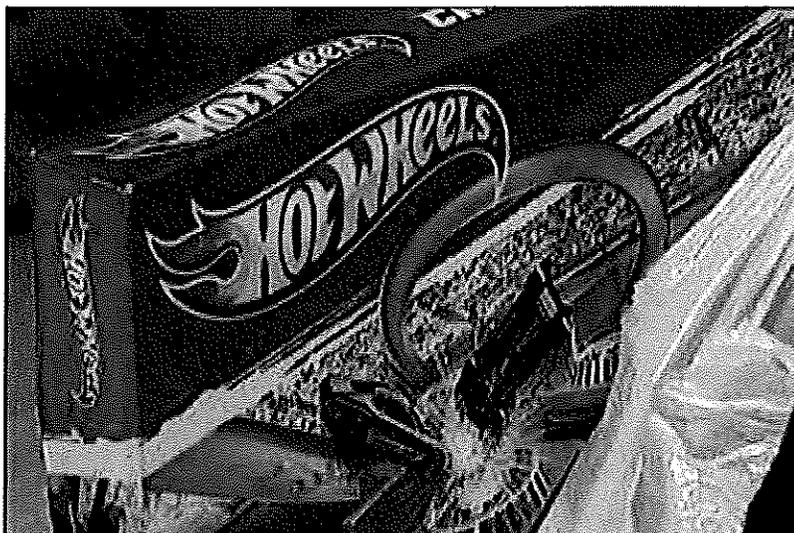
Published: December 09, 2011

Updated: December 09, 2011 - 10:00 AM

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## Fort Bragg conducts Operation Toy Drop

By MyNC Staff



Thousands of Fort Bragg soldiers lined up Friday morning to donate a toy for a chance to jump out of a plane.

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## Countdown to Operation Toy Drop

Drop box locations are still collecting toys for the big jump.

By [Kelly Twedell](#) | [Email the author](#) | December 7, 2011

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Cambodian jumpmasters gathered at Pope Army Air Field to familiarize themselves with the T-11 parachute in anticipation for the 14th Annual Randy Oler Memorial Operation Toy Drop, which officially kicks off Dec. 9, at Fort Bragg. Last year, donations from Fort Bragg paratroopers and their families helped contribute to the more than 10,000 toys which were distributed to children in need around the local Fort Bragg community.

Drop Box locations:

Fort Bragg- 82nd Airborne Museum, JFK Museum, USACAPOC Headquarters, post exchanges and mini-malls.

Fayetteville- FireAntz building on McPherson Church Rd., [Buffalo Wild Wings](#) on Skibo Rd., Fayetteville Cadillac, [Lee Hyundai](#), GD Graphics, Miller Motte Community College on Ramsey Street, Wilson 4x4, and Enterprise [Rent-a-car](#).

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News > Aircrew takes off for Operation Toy Drop

# Aircrew takes off for Operation Toy Drop

Posted 12/9/2011 Updated 12/9/2011 Email story Print story

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by Master Sgt. James Branch  
84th Airlift Wing Public Affairs

12/9/2011 - DOBBINS AIR RESERVE BASE, Ga. -- Dobbins C-130s loaded with 700th Airlift Squadron aircrew and members of the U.S. Army 382nd Combat Camera, East Point, Ga., took flight in route to Fort Bragg, N.C. in support of Operation Toy Drop, taking place tomorrow.

The aircraft will join other C-130s from the 440th Airlift Wing, Pope Army Air field, N.C., 145 AW, Charlotte, N.C., 107 AW, Niagara, N.Y., and Casa 212, UH-60 Blackhawk and CH-47 Chinook helicopters.

Hosted by the U.S. Army Civil Affairs and Psychological Operations Command, Operation Toy Drop is a staple in the Fort Bragg community, and gives reserve and active components of the Army and Air Force the opportunity to combine efforts and give back to the families and communities that support them throughout the year.

Approximately 4000 paratroopers from the U.S. Army Civil Affairs and Psychological Operations Command, 18th Airborne Corps and visiting paratroopers from 11 countries will parachute from Dobbins' and other aircraft and deliver new, unwrapped toys to be distributed to local children's homes and social service agencies.

Last year, Dobbins provided airlift support and helped in distributing nearly 11,000 toys. This year's goal is to deliver over 20,000.

 Comments

No comments yet.

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Dobbins C-130s loaded with 700th Airlift Squadron aircrew and members of the U.S. Army 382nd Combat Camera, East Point, Ga., took flight in route to Fort Bragg, N.C. in support of Operation Toy Drop, taking place Dec. 10. Approximately 4000 paratroopers from the U.S. Army Civil Affairs and Psychological Operations Command, 18th Airborne Corps and visiting paratroopers from 11 countries will parachute from Dobbins' and other aircraft and deliver new, unwrapped toys to be distributed to local children's homes and social service agencies. (U.S. Air Force photo/Master Sgt. James Branch)

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## PHS grad part of massive military toy collection operation

Ric Hallock Gig Harbor Life

Thursday, December 29, 2011

There's no doubt that Santa's sleigh can hold quite a number of toys. But even the Jolly Old Elf himself would be impressed with how many toys one former Gig Harbor resident helped deliver for the holidays.

Lt. Col. Gerald Ostlund, a 1986 Peninsula High School graduate, was part of the U.S. Army's 14th annual Operation Toy Drop that took place Dec. 10 at Fort Bragg, N.C., bringing in 20,000 toys for needy children across the country. The Toy Drop is overseen by the U.S. Army Civil Affairs and Psychological Operations Command (Airborne).

Ostlund joined the Army Reserves in 1987, after graduating from PHS, and attended both Western Washington University in Bellingham and later the University of Washington in Seattle. He worked at a Tacoma advertising agency for a number of years before being mobilized following 9-11.

He served 15 months on active duty in Iraq and also spent a number of years working at the Pentagon, ending up at Fort Bragg where he is currently stationed. This is his second year working Operation Toy Drop, a program that started in the mind of a single paratrooper pulling safety duty at a drop zone.

The first Toy Drop netted around 700 toys, while last year's event brought in more than 11,000. The idea behind the program is based on a simple premise: paratroopers love to earn foreign jump wings.

A paratrooper can earn foreign jump wings only when they jump with a foreign jump master -- something that doesn't happen very often, Ostlund said, as there normally are only foreign jump masters from Germany and Chile on the base.

But for Operation Toy Drop "we had foreign jump masters from 10 different countries," Ostlund said, including Uruguay, Ukraine, Latvia and Cambodia. "A lot of paratroopers would love to have jump wings from the Ukraine," he said.

Those who were on the manifest for the day got to jump, but for those who weren't so lucky, Operation Toy Drop provided an extra 300 chutes that were given out on a

lottery basis the night before. The catch? To qualify for the lottery, a paratrooper had to donate a new toy to the cause.

"We had 4,000 guys show up for the second chance lottery," Ostlund said. Although just 300 earned a chute, Ostlund said no one asked for their toy back. "These guys have big hearts," he said.

The Fort Bragg community also participated. Ostlund estimated around 2,000 spectators attended the Dec. 10 event, many of them also bringing toys to donate. And paratroopers weren't the only military personnel on hand. The weeklong jump exercise involved jump masters, pilots, safety officers and medics and volunteer "elves" who helped sort and transport the toys.

On the day of Operation Toy Drop, 1,500 paratroopers made the jump, with three to four planes airborne at a time with 50 jumpers aboard each one. "We literally filled the skies," Ostlund said.

The toy donation went beyond the borders of Fort Bragg as well. Eight other cities across the country hosted toy donation events Dec. 10 with Army reserve units distributing collected toys in those areas, including the Fisher House at the VA Medical center in Bothell. Fisher House provides a place for families to stay when loved ones are in the medical center for extended periods.

Ostling added that although there was monetary limitation set a for toy donation, "If a McDonalds Happy Meal toy was given as a donation, the elves had a 'box of shame' where that toy would go and a great deal was made around the base to make it known who donated the toy and they would be required to get another donation," he laughed.

But the smiles at the end of the day belonged to the countless children from infants to teens who received a toy thanks to the generosity of everyone involved with Operation Toy Drop.

With planning for the event starting in June, he admits there is a lot of stress involved. Asked if he would do this again next year, Ostlund replied, "If you asked me two weeks earlier, I might have given a different answer. But now that we're done this year, then yes, I will do this again next year.

"In Civil Affairs, this is what we do. We figure out what is needed and make sure civilian sources are taken care of. Toy Drop allows us to do that at home.

Ostlund said that when the Army finally tells him to retire, he'll look back on his long military career and of the top three things that will give him pride, "I guarantee Toy Drop will be one of those three things."



<http://www2.nbc17.com/news/2011/dec/10/1/operation-toy-drop-14576-vi-38667/>



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## Operation Toy Drop

By MyNC Staff



This month is the 14th annual Operation Toy Drop. The event raised more than 10,000 toys for children in need this holiday season.

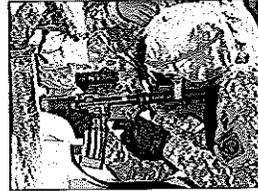
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## Military spouses play Soldier during Jane Wayne Day



Spouses of a paratrooper from 1st Brigade Combat Team, 82nd Airborne Division, are loaded into a C-130 cargo plane to observe a simulated combat jump during Jane Wayne Day at Fort Bragg, Oct. 6. The spouses were required to "suck it in and scoot down" to accurately experience what it is like for the planes normal combat load of 64 paratroopers.



The spouse of a paratrooper from 1st Brigade Combat Team, 82nd Airborne Division, fires an M-4 carbine at a live-fire range during Jane Wayne Day at Fort Bragg, Oct. 6.



The spouse of a paratrooper from 1st Brigade Combat Team, 82nd Airborne Division, experiences the weight of a M249 machine gunner's equipment during Jane Wayne Day at Fort Bragg, Oct. 6. A paratrooper's average combat load can weigh between 42 and 63 pounds.

## 14th Annual Randy Oler Memorial Operation Toy Drop

Behind the scenes of the world's largest combined airborne operation

BY STAFF SGT. SHARILYN WELLS,  
 STAFF SGT. FELIX FIMBERES  
 AND SFC. KATIE SUMMERHILL  
 USACAPOC PAO

*(Editors note: This is a multi-story series that will explain what Operation Toy Drop is, who started it, and the people who make the event happen year after year. This week's topic is about Randy Oler, the founder of Operation Toy Drop. Excerpts have been taken from 2010's story series on the event.)*

Randy Oler, according to close friends, was a man's man, a true American, bigger than life, and a gentle giant whose greatest weakness was a child's smile. So when he approached four of his close friends about an idea he had that involved an airborne operation, foreign jumpmasters, toys, children, and lots of fun, they all jumped on board.

Operation Toy Drop, hosted by the U.S. Army Civil Affairs and Psychological Operations Command, was born in 1993.

That December, after eight months of planning, USACAPOC's first Operation Toy Drop had been completed on a prayer and multiple handshakes between Oler and several organizations around the Fort Bragg community.

The operation gives the military and the civilian community the opportunity to help families in need over the holiday season. Paratroopers bring an unwrapped toy to donate in exchange for the opportunity to get jump wings from allied countries from around the world. This year's event will host allied jumpmasters from 11 countries.

The first Operation Toy Drop, with the help of Marine pilots, was very small and collected few toys. In the years that followed,

the operation grew, grossing more than 56,000 toy donations since its beginning.

Last year, the event drew more than 4,000 paratroopers, 10,900 toys, and 24 allied jumpmasters.

This year, the 14th Annual Randy Oler Memorial Operation Toy Drop is scheduled for Dec. 10, on Sicily Drop zone at 7:30 a.m., and it promised to be bigger and better, providing more toys for families in need. Paratroopers who would like to participate need to bring an unwrapped, brand new toy to Green Ramp on Dec. 9, at 8 a.m., during the parachute lottery in order to earn the opportunity to jump for foreign jump wings from Ukraine, Uruguay, Cambodia and eight other countries participating this year.

Drop-off boxes will be available at each post exchange on Fort Bragg and throughout the community surrounding the installation for people who would like to donate toys. The local hockey team, the Fayetteville FireAntz, will also be collecting toys during their military appreciation game, Dec. 6, which they're dedicating to Operation Toy Drop.

Looking back at the growth of Operation Toy Drop over the past 14 years, it is clear that Oler was able to bring to a big military community the small-town "help-your-neighbor" mentality.

Oler, a Tennessee native, joined the Army in 1979 as an infantryman, spending time in Ranger and Special Forces battalions throughout his career. He deployed in support of Operations Desert Storm, Provide Comfort and Joint Endeavor. In 1995, he joined USACAPOC to become a civil affairs specialist.

"He loved to drink his Mountain Dew and had to have his cigarette with it. You had to get to know him, and when you got to know him, once you learned to know him — you loved him," said Harris Luther, Prime Knight manager for Pope Field, who met Oler while coaching youth sports. "(He) was just a true American and very caring



Photo courtesy of USACAPOC PAO

Sgt. 1st Class Randy Oler, founder of Operation Toy Drop, inspects Maj. Gen. Herbert "Buz" Altschuler's, former commanding general of U.S. Army Civil Affairs and Psychological Operations Command, parachute during the 2003 Operation Toy Drop. Oler, at 43 years old, suffered a heart attack while performing jumpmaster duties aboard a C-130 aircraft and passed away on April 20, 2004. After Oler's death, the operation was dedicated to him in memoriam.

person. You can't describe (Oler) in just one word. He truly cared about people. You just can't say enough good things about him."

By April of 2004, Oler had been promoted to sergeant first class and was finishing up an assignment at the U.S. Army John F. Kennedy Special Warfare Center and School. Even with relocation orders in hand, Oler was already preparing for that year's Operation Toy Drop. He warned his friends that he may not be there to fulfill his duties for the operation, but he was still able to prepare as long as he could.

On April 20, 2004, Sgt. 1st Class Randall R. Oler suffered a heart attack while performing jumpmaster duties aboard a C-130 aircraft. At 43 years old, Oler was pronounced dead at Womack Army Medical Center. After his death, the operation was dedicated to him in memoriam.

"Losing Randy was real hard, because I was here the night Randy passed away on the

those kids were getting. That's why I come back every year. Maybe I lost sight of that after Randy passed, but I now remember that day and no child should be in that sort of position," said Scott Murray, friend and former Soldier in the XVIII Airborne Corps.

Murray is now the XVIII Airborne Corps G-3 Air point of contact and liaison between USACAPOC and corps when the Randy Oler Memorial Operation Toy Drop is in full swing.

Operation Toy Drop is now the largest, combined airborne operation in the world. It is held by the Army Reserve's USACAPOC with the help of Pope Field's 43rd Airlift Wing, the participation of Soldiers from Fort Bragg's XVIII Airborne Corps, 82nd Airborne Division and Special Operations Command.

"We have said that if Randy could see us now, he'd be laughing that (the operation) has gone from 'Hey buddy, can you help me get 200 people on a jump to having (thousands of) people jumping for the first day alone and having (over 10,000) toy donations," laughed Becki Caldwell, a close friend and "Head Elf" for Operation Toy Drop.

"I don't think you'll ever meet another person like Randy," Wellbrook reflected. "Randy left a legacy and I think his legacy is what he said on the back of that pickup truck with Scott Murray. It was what he could do for local kids and he hit the ground running. It's blown into a huge operation and I think Toy Drop will be here as long as kids are in need."

For more information about donating toys, attending the event, locations of toy donation drop-off boxes, or the FireAntz military appreciation games, visit [www.optoydrop.net](http://www.optoydrop.net). Operation Toy Drop is also on Facebook, search for Operation Toy Drop and "like" the page for the quickest, up-to-date information on the event.

aircraft," explained close friend Willie Wellbrook, a retired Air Force master sergeant and now head loadmaster for Operation Toy Drop. "I got the call that we had an in-flight emergency. I just didn't realize at the time who it was until the next day. Losing Randy was tough because Randy was the heart and soul of this operation."

Close friends couldn't see continuing with Operation Toy Drop without Oler and that year's event was in jeopardy. Oler was able to do all the coordinating in his head and didn't write anything down. But by August, Oler's friends looked at each other and decided that Oler would have wanted them to continue helping the children around the community.

"There's one story I like to tell. One year, we had a bunch of toys and Randy and I put 'em in a van, and we drove out to Tennessee. We pulled up to an orphanage and the sisters there were in tears because they told us that those were the only toys



# Fort Bragg Spotlight

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## 14th Annual Randy Oler Memorial Operation Toy Drop

From parachutes to calculus class, paratroopers, students team up to spread holiday cheer

By Staff Sgts. Felix Fimbres and Shariyn Wells and Spc. Katie Summerhill USACAPOC

*(Editors note: This is part three of a multi-story series that will explain what Operation Toy Drop is, who started it, and the people who make the event happen year after year. This week's topic features the North Carolina School of Science and Mathematics in Durham and the teens who decided to help others in need.)*

While most teenagers are worried about what they are getting for Christmas, a small but growing number of them are becoming more interested in the kids who might not be getting any toys this year. That's because teens like Logan Herrera and Krutal Amin are joining paratroopers from Fort Bragg to spread holiday cheer to the local community in the name of the 14th Annual Randy Oler Memorial Operation Toy Drop.

It may seem like an odd mix at first, but it's obvious that the Christmas spirit doesn't care if you wear a uniform or are studying calculus.

The two students attend school at the North Carolina School of Science and Mathematics in Durham, N.C., and got the Toy Drop bug through Herrera's father and grandfather who both served in the Army and have been supporters of the operation.

"I actually wanted to see the operation last year, but I couldn't," said Herrera who is organizing the effort at the school. "So I thought it would be a wonderful thing to do school wide this year."

In order to get the ball rolling, Herrera invited Staff Sgt. Christina Hippenbecker, air coordinator



Photo by Staff Sgt. Felix Fimbres/USACAPOC

From left to right: Staff Sgt. Christina Hippenbecker, Maysa Davis, Madisaine Katz, Zack Fowler, Logan Herrera, Vipul Vadivajanti hold up a Toy Drop poster in front of the the North Carolina School of Science and Math in Durham, N.C. on Friday. Students from NCSSM will be collecting toys and supporting Toy Drop to help spread holiday cheer.

and primary jumpmaster for Operation Toy Drop, to visit the NCSSM campus in Durham and talk about Operation Toy Drop and the impact it has on the community.

Hippenbecker and a cadre of student body representatives, set up shop in a busy hallway of the school and began talking up Operations Toy Drop. Many of the students Hippenbecker talked to were surprised that the Army was running such a project, and also excited for the chance to be a part of it. Many of them even asked what sort of toys were needed most. Hippenbecker explained that a lot of toys get donated for boys and not a lot for young and teenage girls.

"I know exactly where to go and what I'm going to get already," said one of the students enthusiastically before running down a laundry list of ideas.

The enthusiasm was infectious, and it's been a word of mouth campaign that has sparked a huge interest on campus.

NCSSM is a unique residential

high school whose student body is comprised of teens from each county in North Carolina.

"We're members of two communities, NCSSM in Durham and then our hometown, so it gives us an extra opportunity to reach out," said Herrera.

And this effort has already materialized in Harrisburg, N.C., near Herrera's hometown, where the Hickory Ridge High School Band has already held an Operation Toy Drop concert to raise awareness and collect toys.

NCSSM and Hickory Ridge High are two of more than a dozen schools, universities, and area businesses that have adopted Operation Toy Drop including Fayetteville State University and the Fayetteville Fire/Ariz, the local hockey team. Serving the local community has been one of the major tenets of Operation Toy Drop since Sgt. 1st Class Randy Oler started it in 1998.

Even though 2011 marks the first year Operation Toy Drop will go coast to coast, the event will remain small-community centered

thanks to the unique nature of its host, U.S. Army Civil Affairs and Psychological Operations Command. The event gives the military and the civilian community the opportunity to help families in need over the holiday season. Paratroopers bring an unwrapped toy to donate in exchange for the opportunity to get allied jump wings from around the world. This year's event will host allied jumpmasters from 11 countries.

USACAPOC is made up of nearly 13,000 Army Reserve Soldiers who are very much a part of their local community in 30 states and in Puerto Rico. Seven units in five states are spearheading their own Operation Toy Drop events to raise and deliver new toys to kids who might otherwise be forgotten.

"One of the hardest things for us is actually finding out who needs the toys," said Hippenbecker while talking with Amin about possible roles NCSSM could play in Operation Toy Drop. She challenged them to help USACAPOC locate kids who might otherwise not have a happy Christmas.

NCSSM might be perfectly suited to help expand Operation Toy Drop, having displayed an ability to perform monumental tasks already.

"We have already broken the world record for most food collected, so we definitely love to make an impact on our community," explained Amin. "So it really means a lot to each of us individually to be able to put a smile on a child's face."

"We're having a hall-by-hall competition (for toys)," he said. "The winners will have the opportunity to come down to Fort Bragg and participate in Toy Drop's airborne refresher training,

which has really excited a lot of kids" Amin explained.

"I definitely think students would donate regardless of the prize," added Herrera. "Service is one of the qualities we look for in applicants and over the summer we are required to perform over 60 hours of community service a year to graduate, so it's very much a part of NCSSM's culture," he explained.

"Our school is really excited about service and we really like to get involved, so it was a great opportunity right around Christmas time," said Amin, who is a senior.

Keeping the torch going is one of Herrera's goals.

"I will be at the school next year so I can continue it next year and really ingrain it in the culture and I definitely foresee it continuing in the future," said Herrera.

"Even if we collected one toy, just making that one kid smile would be enough for me," smiled Amin. "That's incentive enough."

The 14th Annual Randy Oler Memorial Operation Toy Drop is scheduled on Dec. 10, on Scully Drop Zone, at 7:30 a.m., and promises to be bigger and better, allowing more toys to be given to families in need. Paratroopers wishing to participate need to bring an unwrapped, brand new toy to Green Ramp, Pope Field, on Dec. 9, at 8 a.m., during the parachute lottery in order to earn the opportunity to jump for foreign jump wings from Ukraine, Uruguay, Cambodia and eight other countries participating this year.

For more information about donating toys, attending the event, or locations of toy donation collection boxes, visit [www.optoy-drop.net](http://www.optoy-drop.net). Operation Toy Drop is also on Facebook.

## To the rescue: Blue Star Mothers help others in need

By Spc. PAULA HOLSTON XVIII AXC CREW BAO

When a family is separated because of a deployment, it's normally the spouses back home worrying about their loved one in harm's way.

The last thing anyone deployed expects is for their family back home to be killed only months before redeployment. Unfortunately, for Tech Sgt. Donald Ramsey, these were the circumstances he was coming home to.

On Oct. 17, Ramsey, an airman from the



Linn



Provencher

Oklahoma Air National Guard, returned to the U.S. along with the first main body of XVIII Airborne Corps from Iraq to Fort Bragg.

Normally he would be reunited with his family immediately, he returned on emergency leave, with the tragedy of both his wife and daughter being killed in a motor vehicle accident.

Fortunately for Ramsey, there are those who show selfless service and help those, no matter the circumstance. Ann Provencher and Barb Linn would be there for him when he most needed it.

Provencher and Linn, both Blue Star Mothers, an organization of mothers who have, or have had, children serving in the nation's active, Reserve, or Guard armed forces. They have experience to it comes

with the military lifestyle.

Provencher and her husband are Army veterans, who have two children who are currently in the Navy and Army, with one currently deployed.

Additionally, Linn's husband is an Army retiree, and they have two sons and two sons-in-law in the Army.

Before Ramsey's arrival, Linn received a phone call from a fellow Blue Star Mother in Oklahoma and was informed of Ramsey's situation.

"She asked me if we could help her and I said yes without knowing any of the circumstances," Linn said. "I told her to give me as much information as she could and we would go from there."

These women consider helping anyone in need in any type of situation, whether tragic or

triumphant, more than just a job; they consider it their calling.

"Our mission is to reach out and support all the servicemembers," said Provencher. "Even though they are all grown men and women, we see them as our own children in the same uniforms."

Without hesitation, both women immediately went to work trying to meet every need that Ramsey would need upon his arrival.

"We made a bunch of phone calls and got lodging reservations ready for him and his escort to stay the night, along with accommodations to get a flight out of Durham

to Oklahoma," said Provencher.

On the night of Ramsey's arrival, Provencher and Linn waited along with the Families of XVIII Airborne Corps, to see the person whom they helped so much.

"The first thing we did when he stepped into the hangar was immediately give him a hug," said Provencher. "We expressed our condolences and comforted him as much as we could as he was getting ready for his follow-on transportation."

As Ramsey was waiting for his bags, he asked Linn if she wanted to see the picture of his wife and daughter from his

phone. As he showed her the picture, he began to become overwhelmed with emotion.

"When he was looking at the picture on his phone, I just kissed him on the head and gave him a hug as if he was one of mine," Linn said. "He then said to me, 'It must be just a momentary thing, because you're doing everything that's making me feel better.'"

Although up to that point they did not know Ramsey personally, both women knew they had done the right thing, as it is instilled in them to help those in need.

"It's the little things that matter the most," said Provencher.

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# 14th Annual Randy Oler Memorial Operation Toy Drop: A toy's story

By STAFF SGT. SHARILYN WELLS, FELIX FIMBRES AND SFC. KATIE SUMMERHILL USACAPOC PAO

*(Editors note: This is part five of a multi-story series that explains what Operation Toy Drop is, who started it, and the people who make the event happen year after year. This week's topic features a hopeful paratrooper picking out his toy for the chance to jump in the event and earn a set of foreign jump wings.)*

Steven Blum, from the 2nd Battalion, 504th Parachute Infantry Regiment, knew exactly what he was looking for when he stepped inside the busy toy store filled with holiday shoppers. As a kid, Blum, who's now a 2nd lieutenant, loved anything with wheels and heading straight to the large remote control section of the boys' toy area.

"Well, I saw on the Operation Toy Drop website that one of the bigger needs for toys was for younger teenage boys," explained Blum. "When I was little, that was something I really enjoyed playing with. So, I decided that's something I'd like to give."

Thinking ahead, Blum picked up a remote control Ferrari and checked to make sure batteries were included or not — they were. Smiling, Blum headed to the cashier to purchase his toy for donation.

"I'm pumped, I'm excited, and hopefully I get on a jump on the 9th of December," Blum said as he



Photo by Staff Sgt. Felix Fimbres/USACAPOC PAO

2nd Lt. Steven Blum, 2nd Battalion, 504th Parachute Infantry Regiment, picked out a remote-controlled Ferrari with batteries included, to donate for a chance to jump in the Operation Toy Drop, Friday.

swiped his debit card. "We see that there are people in our own community who are less fortunate and this is the chance to do something to help them out that's unique to Fort Bragg and the airborne community."

Blum is referring to the 14th Annual Randy Oler Operation Toy Drop, a philanthropic project where Fort Bragg's paratroopers and visiting paratroopers from across the nation, donate toys to be distributed to children's homes and social service agencies across the country. Paratroopers who donate a toy are entered into a lottery for the chance to earn foreign jump wings. Hosted by the U.S. Army Civil Affairs and Psychological

Operations Command and founded by Sgt. 1st Class Randy Oler in 1993, this year's operation will host allied jumpmasters from 11 countries.

"I think it's a pretty cool idea. It's a win-win for both sides," explained Blum, who will be participating for the first time this year. "Children in need get to have a little something extra for the holidays and the paratroopers out there get the chance to earn foreign jump wings, which is pretty popular for guys to get."

The first Operation Toy Drop in 1993, with the help of Marine pilots, was very small and collected a small number of toys. In the years that followed, the operation continued

to grow, raising more than 56,000 toy donations since it's beginning. Last year, the event drew more than 4,000 paratroopers, 10,900 toys, and 24 allied jumpmasters.

The 14th Annual Randy Oler Memorial Operation Toy Drop kicks off with the lottery on Friday at 8 a.m. Paratroopers who were not lucky enough to earn one of the limited seats manifested for each unit, get a second chance at the lottery by donating a new unwrapped toy. Blum hopes to get one of the more than 300 parachutes set aside for the lottery so he can earn a foreign jump wing from Ukraine, Uruguay, Cambodia or one of the other eight countries participating this year.

The airborne operation is scheduled for Dec. 10, on Sicily Drop Zone, at 7:30 a.m., and promises to be bigger and better, allowing more toys to be given to families in need.

The public can also participate in Operation Toy Drop and it's festivities Dec. 10 on Sicily Drop Zone. Toy collection boxes are available at each post exchange on Fort Bragg and throughout the community surrounding the installation for people who would like to donate toys. The local hockey team, the Fayetteville FireAntz, will also be collecting toys during their military appreciation game, Tuesday, which they dedicated to Operation Toy Drop.

"(Operation Toy Drop) shows that not just the people local to Fort Bragg know that people are in need and want to help, but people around the world," said Blum. "Everyone knows that there's someone out there who could use a little something extra to brighten their spirits around the holidays."

Operation Toy Drop is now the largest combined airborne operation in the world. It is held by the Army Reserve's USACAPOC with the help of Pope Field's 440th Airlift Wing and the United States Army Special Operations Command Flight Detachment, and of course the participation of Soldiers from Fort Bragg's XVIII Airborne Corps and 82nd Airborne Division.

On the way out of the toy store, Blum, with the remote controlled Ferrari in hand, smiled.

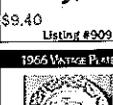
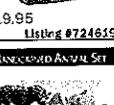
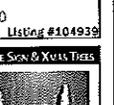
"The whole point of (this event) is to make someone better; it doesn't matter if we get on a jump or not, if we benefit or not, that's not the reason for this," he said. "It may be an incentive for some out there to participate but it's definitely about helping others out. It's a good experience for everyone."

For more information about donating toys, attending the event, or locations of toy donation collection boxes, visit [www.optoydrop.net](http://www.optoydrop.net).

Operation Toy Drop is also on Facebook, search for Operation Toy Drop and "like" the page for the quickest, up-to-date information on the event.

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# 14th Annual Randy Oler Memorial Operation Toy Drop: Behind the scenes of the world's largest combined airborne operation

By STAFF SGTs.  
SHARILYN WELLS  
AND FELIX FIERBERG AND  
SPC. KATIE SUDDERHILL  
USACAPOC PAO

*(Editors note: This is part four of a multi-story series that will explain what Operation Toy Drop is, who started it, and the people who make the event happen year after year. This week's topic features the parachute riggers of the 824th Quartermaster Company, who ensure paratroopers are safely equipped for the operation.)*

Packing a parachute requires the utmost concentration and attention to every single detail, because the U.S. Army parachute riggers are responsible for the life of every paratrooper who steps out of a plane.

For the riggers of the 824th Quartermaster Company, safely packing parachutes and safety equipment is always their first mission. But dealing with 2,500 parachutes for the 14th Annual Randy Oler Memorial Operation Toy Drop requires long man-hours and diligent minds to ensure the safety of every participating paratrooper.

Operation Toy Drop, hosted by the U.S. Army Civil Affairs and Psychological Operations Command, was founded by Sgt. 1st Class Randy Oler in 1998. The event gives the military and the civilian community the opportunity to help Families in need over the holiday season. Paratroopers bring an unwrapped toy to donate in exchange for the opportunity to get allied jump wings from around the world. This year's event will host allied jumpmasters from 11 countries.

"You have to prepare for Toy Drop differently versus a normal airborne operation because of how large the operation actually is," explained Staff Sgt. Michael Sharp, 824th QM Co. parachute packer supervisor and shop foreman. "It entails a lot more paratroopers in a short amount of time, so you have to prepare accordingly."

"We've been having early work calls the past few days, with the guys working 12 hours days, making sure that everything gets done," Sharp explained.

"We actually have two Toy Drops going on this year, we have one in AP Hill, Virginia and the one here on Fort Bragg," explained Pvt. 1st Class Jacob Smith, a rigger with the company. "So we need to make sure the parachutes are safe to jump before we can supply them to the paratroopers." This is the first year



Photo by Staff Sgt. Felix Fierberg/USACAPOC PAO

Riggers prepare parachutes for Operation Toy Drop at Fort Bragg on Tuesday. Thousands of parachutes are packed and prepared by these Army Reserve Soldiers with the 824th Quartermasters every year to support not only Operation Toy Drop, but many other missions as well.

that Operation Toy Drop will be conducted outside of the Fort Bragg area. USACAPOC is made up of nearly 13,000 Army Reserve Soldiers who are very much a part of their own local community in 30 states and Puerto Rico. Seven USACAPOC units in five states are spearheading their own local Operation Toy Drop events to raise and deliver new toys to deserving kids who might otherwise be forgotten.

Even though the operation is going to take a lot of man hours to pack and repack the parachutes for two Operation Toy Drops, the company is supporting, Pvt. 1st Class Jacob Smith, a rigger with the company, explained what keeps him going.

"It means a lot to the community and it's a great opportunity for everyone," Smith said. "This is my first time doing Toy Drop and I feel good about it. It feels good to be able to help out children and Families that are maybe going through a rough time so that they can have a better Christmas."

Sharp said that Operation Toy Drop is a good program that helps the community and the military to come together as one and helps the civilian population appreciate the military and that we do care about the community.

"Being one of the supervisor riggers in the shop, my duties and responsibilities are very important in making sure this operation goes, especially with the amount of parachutes we need. So it gives me a sense of importance, if you will," Sharp explained. "The magnitude of this operation is definitely felt every day I come in. But it's a good feeling because a lot of Soldiers wouldn't

get this sort of training outside of the operation ... working and jumping with foreign jumpmasters. It's also good knowing that we're doing something to help out the community."

The first Operation Toy Drop in 1998, with the help of Marine pilots, was very small and collected a small amount of toys. In the years to follow, the operation continued to grow, grossing more than 56,000 toy donations since it's beginning. Last year, the event drew more than 4,000 paratroopers, 10,900 toys, and 24 allied jumpmasters.

The 14th Annual Randy Oler Memorial Operation Toy Drop is scheduled on Dec. 10, on Sicily Drop Zone, at 7:30 a.m., and promises to be bigger and better, allowing more toys to be given to Families in need. Paratroopers wishing to participate need to bring an unwrapped, brand new toy to Green Ramp, Pope Field, on Dec. 9, at 8 a.m., during the parachute lottery in order to earn the opportunity to jump for foreign jump wings from Ukraine, Uruguay, Cambodia and eight

other countries participating this year.

With allied countries participating in Operation Toy Drop, special care is given to explain the differences in equipment and safety during the operation. Before paratroopers are given safety briefs from their assigned country, allied jumpmasters are familiarized with U.S. parachutes, safety equipment and aircrafts to ensure maximum safety for all.

Operation Toy Drop is now the largest combined airborne operation in the world. It is held by the Army Reserve's USACAPOC with the help of Pope Field's 440th Airlift Wing, the participation of Soldiers from Fort Bragg's XVIII Airborne Corps, 82nd Airborne Division and Special Operations Command.

Looking at the growth of Operation Toy Drop over the past 14 years,

it is clear that Oler was able to bring to a big, military community the small-town, "help-your-neighbor" mentality. Toy collection boxes will be available at each post exchange on Fort Bragg and throughout the community surrounding the installation for people who would like to donate toys. The local hockey team, the Fayetteville FireAntz, will also be collecting toys during their military appreciation game, Tuesday, which they're dedicating to Operation Toy Drop.

"It's a good feeling knowing that there's a kid out there somewhere and you have made his Christmas day a little better. It's a good feeling knowing you made him smile," said Sharp. "Yes, paratroopers get foreign jump wings and all, but it's important to know the true reason why this operation exists and it's to help out those in need and the community."

For more information about donating toys, attending the event, locations of toy donation collection boxes, or the FireAntz military appreciation games, visit [www.optoydrop.net](http://www.optoydrop.net).

Operation Toy Drop is also on Facebook, search for Operation Toy Drop and "like" the page for the quickest, up-to-date information on the event.

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—Allison Schwartz

## AN ELITE PERSPECTIVE

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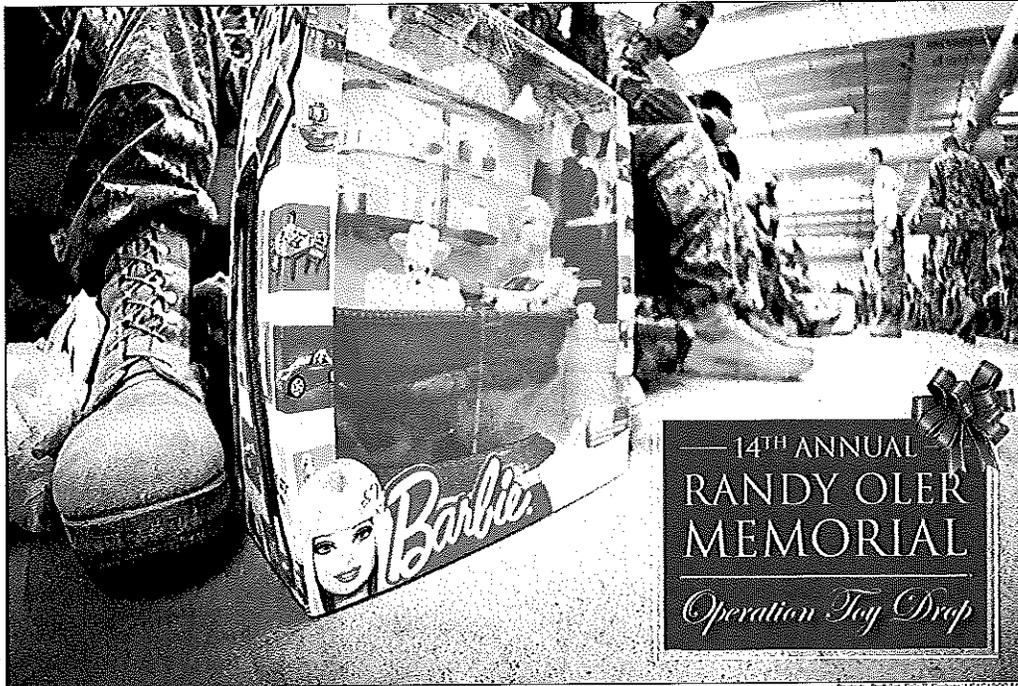
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Paratroopers participate in Operation Toy Drop, Dec. 9.

— 14<sup>TH</sup> ANNUAL  
**RANDY OLER  
 MEMORIAL**  
*Operation Toy Drop*

Photo by Sgt. Sgt. 1st Lt. P. Oler, USACAPOC/14

## Paratroopers receive much more than foreign jump wings at Operation Toy Drop

BY STAFF SGTs. SHARILYN WELLS,  
 FELIX FIMBRES AND  
 SPC. KATIE SUMMERHILL  
 USACAPOC(A) PAO

*(Editors note: This is last part of a multi-story series that will explain what Operation Toy Drop is, who started it, and the people who make the event happen year after year. This week's topic features the parachute lottery and the airborne operation on Sicily Drop Zone.)*

It was apparent on Dec. 9, at 6 a.m., when the first paratrooper got in line in front of Green Ramp on Pope Field, that he wanted the chance to earn a pair of foreign jump wings. But his motivation was the opportunity to donate a toy to a child this holiday season.

Spc. Jermain Jackson, 2nd Battalion, 319th Airborne Field Artillery Regiment, Headquarters and Headquarters Battalion, joked that it took about a week to prepare and train to be the first paratrooper standing in line, specifically a lot of push-ups and sit-ups and eating right. But in reality, Jackson woke up really early, armed with a Captain America toy and tank.

"It's bitter sweet because I had a battle buddy who was parked right next to me and he was there since midnight actually and I showed up at 2 a.m. However, I figured instead of staying inside the car and staying warm and toasty, I decided to go out and stand in front and now I'm the true number one. It's awesome to be number one," said Jackson. "I think (Operation Toy Drop) is a beautiful idea. I like the idea that some kids out there are going to get squared away. I have two kids of my own and we already have our Christmas set up so it's good to do that for someone else."

Over 3,000 paratroopers donated toys ranging from Barbies to bikes to MP3s for the chance to be put into a lottery to earn the chance to jump in the 14th Annual Randy Oler Memorial Operation Toy Drop. The fact that only 300 parachutes were up for the lottery didn't stop these giving Soldiers from ensuring that children across the country have a present under the tree.

Operation Toy Drop rolled community service, airborne operations and international cooperation all into one giant event. All toys collected will be dispersed to over 26 local children's homes and social service agencies in the coming weeks, not to mention the

hundreds of toys already donated and distributed to social service agencies in eight other locations from California to New York. Military Families in need, and Fort Bragg's Womack Army Medical Center also receive their share of Operation Toy Drop gifts.

The operation gives the military community the opportunity to help Families in need over the holiday season and offers Soldiers a holiday treat of their own. Paratroopers who donate an unwrapped toy are entered for the opportunity to participate in airborne operations supervised by a foreign jumpmaster from one of ten countries — Toy Drop veteran participants Canada, Chile, Germany, Thailand and Poland, and newcomers Cambodia, Latvia, Ukraine, Uruguay and the Netherlands.

Pope Field's Green Ramp loading area turned into the world's least likely toy store Dec. 9, as Soldiers lined up for the donation and jump slot raffle with toys in one hand and their helmets in the other. The general rule of thumb among paratroopers is donate a gift worth receiving something they'd be happy to see their own children unwrap during the holidays.

For Spc. James Hall, XVIII Airborne Corps, whose lottery number was called first, Operation Toy Drop was just another way to give back to the community.

"I just remember staring at my ticket trying to remember my number and as soon I heard it, I was stoked. It was crazy because I do this every year, not the jump thing, but actually donate. My mom is the one who actually said that if you have, you should give to those who don't have," explained Hall. "I was just hoping to get inside and get a slot, and the fact that I got the first slot is just crazy; never thought that would happen."

Hall brought a bicycle, helmet, elbow and knee pads to be donated. "Figured you couldn't ride a bicycle without the PPE (proper protective equipment)."

After graduating from airborne school, deployments prevented Hall from jumping. Operation Toy Drop will be the 10th jump for the paratrooper who is afraid of heights.

Operation Toy Drop began in 1993 and at the time, brought in around 550 toys for children in need. Its founder, then-Staff Sergeant Randy Oler, had dreamed of an event that combined



Photo by Sgt. Sgt. 1st Lt. P. Oler, USACAPOC/14

Santa and Mrs. Claus make a grand entrance on their sleigh, a UH-60 Black Hawk, as they land on Sicily Drop Zone, Saturday. Operation Toy Drop is a family-friendly event; spouses, children and friends gathered at a viewing area on the drop zone to watch their loved ones earn their set of international airborne wings.

airborne operations, foreign military jumpmasters and local charities. When Oler passed away in 2004, Operation Toy Drop inherited his name and his spirit.

"Since the beginning we have collected over 56,000 toys. This is a way for paratroopers to give back to our community," said Maj. Gen. Jeffrey Jacobs, U.S. Army Civil Affairs and Psychological Operations Command commanding general. "For someone like me who's been in the Army for 32 years and been around the airborne a long time, it's always great to be around paratroopers, especially great to be part of an operation like this. Not only do these guys get to jump for fun, they get to give these toys to less fortunate children."

Operation Toy Drop continues to grow as more and more organizations and businesses jump to support the spirit of the event. Thus far in 2011, that number has surpassed 13,000, and continues to rise, as toys continue to come in over the next week from special operations units and community donation boxes located around Fayetteville.

"Toy Drop is great for a number of reasons, explained Jacobs, who has 132 jumps in his log. "Not only do we get to help these kids have a great holiday season that they wouldn't get otherwise, but we are also giving these great, young paratroopers the opportunity to earn a set of foreign jump wings, a once in a lifetime experience for them," he said.

"And as an Army Reserve command, which has the majority of the civil affairs and (psychological operations) Soldiers, we also have the majority of the Army Reserves paratroopers," he added. "So, it's our opportunity to show the rest of the Army that there is no

difference between an Army Reserve paratrooper and an active component paratrooper, for that matter the difference between an Army Reserve Soldier and an active component Soldier. So it's a great operation all around," Jacobs explained.

Operation Toy Drop is now the world's largest, multi-nation airborne operation. The event incorporates almost every active-duty Army unit on Fort Bragg.

Hosted by the Army Reserve's USACAPOC, Toy Drop is possible only with the active support of Pope Field's Air Force Reserve 440<sup>th</sup> Airlift Wing and the U.S. Army Special Operations Command Eight Detachment. This year, USACAPOC has also had units in California, Louisiana, Missouri, New York, and Washington participate in toy donation distributions, spreading the event's spirit nationwide.

"I jumped with Sergeant first Class Randy Oler way back in the day and I left USACAPOC before Toy Drop came about and it's great to be back," said Jacobs. "He loved doing two things. He loved jumping out of airplanes and loved putting smiles on little kids faces and Toy Drop gave him the opportunity to do both. His vision has grown; these guys and gals out here are doing both things and he would be very proud," he said.

In the coming weeks, USACAPOC Soldiers will deliver loads of toys to children's homes and service agencies throughout the country.

For more information about Operation Toy Drop or donating toys, visit [www.optoydrop.net](http://www.optoydrop.net). Operation Toy Drop is also on Facebook; search for Operation Toy Drop and "Eke" the page for the quickest, up-to-date information on the event.

Homepage > News Archives > Article

## 14th Annual Randy Oler Operation Toy Drop delivers

December 22, 2011

By Spc. Kathryn Summerhilt, U.S. Army Civil Affairs and Psychological Operations Command (Airborne)

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CHARLOTTE, N.C. (Dec. 22, 2011) -- Visitors walking through main entrance of Levine Children's Hospital in Charlotte, N.C., are surrounded by light. The hospital's prism design fills them with an unexpected sense of hope, as the hospital is home to 234 children ranging in age from newborns to 18 years old.

The children of Levine Children's Hospital suffer from serious illnesses including cancer and leukemia, yet were all smiles when Soldiers, Airmen and Carolina Panther players visited the hospital, Dec. 19.

As part of the 14th Annual Randy Oler Memorial Operation Toy Drop, Levine Children's Hospital was one of many recipients of toys donated by participants of the charitable, airborne operation hosted by the U.S. Army Civil Affairs & Psychological Operations Command (Airborne), or USACAPOC(A), headquartered at Fort Bragg, N.C.

Service members from the Army and Air Force, and players from the Carolina Panthers, took toys and clothes to the hospital, in hopes of raising some holiday cheer. The Panther players had the day off, but there was no hesitation for the players to spend the day with these children.

"We kind of jumped at the opportunity to come out here," said Dan Conner, linebacker for the Carolina Panthers. "It is unbelievable when you see the kids' faces when they come in. You get to see them pick out a toy, meet some of the players and meet some Army guys. As a kid it has to be a great experience. It is something where you can put a smile on kids' faces who are in tough situations."

And those smiles are what keep some of the Soldiers coming back to Operation Toy Drop, year after year.

"This is the side of Toy Drop that very few people get to see," explained Master Sgt. James McCloskey, a retention noncommissioned officer at USACAPOC(A). "It's a special thing for me especially because I spent the first couple years of my life in the children's

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hospital in Philadelphia. So to come in here and understand the extent of what some of these kids are going through, it's an incredible feeling."

Levine Children's Hospital received a fraction of the 20,000 toys donated to Operation Toy Drop in 2011. The rest are being distributed throughout the Carolinas and eight other locations to hospitals, children's homes, orphanages and families in need this holiday season.

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**U.S. Army Civil Affairs and Psychological Operations Command (Airborne)**

11/28/2011	USACAPOC (Fort Bragg)	Fayetteville FireAntz Operation Toy Drop PSA	Audio	Newscasts	WRNV Midshipman Radio	MD	40,000	<a href="#">View Item</a>
11/28/2011	USACAPOC (Fort Bragg)	Fayetteville FireAntz Operation Toy Drop PSA	Audio	Newscasts	West Point Radio	NY	40,000	<a href="#">View Item</a>
11/28/2011	USACAPOC (Fort Bragg)	Carolina Panthers Operation Toy Drop PSA	Audio	Newscasts	KAFA-FM Air Force Radio	CO	40,000	<a href="#">View Item</a>
11/28/2011	USACAPOC (Fort Bragg)	Operation Toy Drop PSA	Audio	Newscasts	WRNV Midshipman Radio	MD	40,000	<a href="#">View Item</a>
11/28/2011	USACAPOC (Fort Bragg)	Fayetteville FireAntz Operation Toy Drop PSA	Audio	Newscasts	West Point Radio	NY	40,000	<a href="#">View Item</a>
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11/29/2011	USACAPOC (Fort Bragg)	Carolina Panthers Operation Toy Drop PSA	Video	PSA	Carolina Panthers	NC	(N/A)	<a href="#">View Item</a>
11/28/2011	USACAPOC (Fort Bragg)	Civil affairs soldiers prepare for Africa	News	US	National Guard Bureau	VA	60,600	<a href="#">View Item</a>
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11/29/2011	USACAPOC (Fort Bragg)	Civil affairs soldiers prepare for Africa	Images	Images	Army.mil	DC	1,000,000	<a href="#">View Item</a>
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12/02/2011	USACAPOC (Fort Bragg)	Carolina Panthers Operation Toy Drop PSA	Video	PSA	Twitter	CA	94,600,000	<a href="#">View Item</a>







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12/14/2011	USACAPOC (Fort Bragg)	Lt. Col. Gerald Ostlund Interview	Audio	Interviews	Seattle Times	Seattle	WA	263,000	<a href="#">View Item</a>
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12/14/2011	USACAPOC (Fort Bragg)	14th Annual Randy Oler Memorial Operation Toy Drop	Images	Images	World Wrestling Entertainment	Fort Bragg	CT	(N/A)	<a href="#">View Item</a>
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12/14/2011	USACAPOC (Fort Bragg)	Toy Drop	Images	Images	World Wrestling Entertainment	Fayetteville	CT	(N/A)	<a href="#">View Item</a>
12/14/2011	USACAPOC (Fort Bragg)	Operation Toy Drop	Images	Images	World Wrestling Entertainment	Fort Bragg	CT	(N/A)	<a href="#">View Item</a>
12/14/2011	USACAPOC (Fort Bragg)	Toy drop	Images	Images	World Wrestling Entertainment	Fort Bragg	CT	(N/A)	<a href="#">View Item</a>
12/14/2011	USACAPOC (Fort Bragg)	Toy drop	Images	Images	World Wrestling Entertainment	Fayetteville	SC	4,000	<a href="#">View Item</a>
12/14/2011	USACAPOC (Fort Bragg)	Toy drop	Images	Images	Myrtle Beach Herald	Fayetteville	CT	(N/A)	<a href="#">View Item</a>
12/14/2011	USACAPOC (Fort Bragg)	Toy drop	Images	Images	World Wrestling Entertainment	Fayetteville	CT	(N/A)	<a href="#">View Item</a>
12/14/2011	USACAPOC (Fort Bragg)	Lottery Day	Images	Images	World Wrestling Entertainment	Fayetteville	CT	(N/A)	<a href="#">View Item</a>
12/14/2011	USACAPOC (Fort Bragg)	Toy Drop	Images	Images	Myrtle Beach Herald	Fayetteville	CT	(N/A)	<a href="#">View Item</a>
12/14/2011	USACAPOC (Fort Bragg)	14th Annual Randy Oler Memorial Operation Toy Drop	Images	Images	World Wrestling Entertainment	Fort Bragg	SC	4,000	<a href="#">View Item</a>
12/14/2011	USACAPOC (Fort Bragg)	Lottery Day	Images	Images	Myrtle Beach Herald	Fayetteville	SC	4,000	<a href="#">View Item</a>
12/14/2011	USACAPOC (Fort Bragg)	14th Annual Randy Oler Memorial Operation Toy Drop	Images	Images	Myrtle Beach Herald	Fort Bragg	SC	4,000	<a href="#">View Item</a>
12/15/2011	USACAPOC (Fort Bragg)	Toy Drop	Images	Images	DMA- Fort Meade	Fort Bragg	MD	111	<a href="#">View Item</a>
12/15/2011	USACAPOC (Fort Bragg)	Toy drop	Images	Images	Gig Harbor Life	Fort Bragg	WA	18	<a href="#">View Item</a>
12/15/2011	USACAPOC (Fort Bragg)	Toy Drop	Images	Images	Gig Harbor Life	Fort Bragg	WA	18	<a href="#">View Item</a>
12/15/2011	USACAPOC (Fort Bragg)	Toy drop	Images	Images	Gig Harbor Life	Fort Bragg	WA	18	<a href="#">View Item</a>
12/15/2011	USACAPOC (Fort Bragg)	Toy drop	Images	Images	Gig Harbor Life	Fort Bragg	WA	18	<a href="#">View Item</a>
12/15/2011	USACAPOC (Fort Bragg)	Toy Drop	Images	Images	Gig Harbor Life	Fort Bragg	WA	18	<a href="#">View Item</a>
12/15/2011	USACAPOC (Fort Bragg)	Toy drop	Images	Images	Gig Harbor Life	Fort Bragg	WA	18	<a href="#">View Item</a>
12/15/2011	USACAPOC (Fort Bragg)	Toy drop	Images	Images	Gig Harbor Life	Fort Bragg	WA	18	<a href="#">View Item</a>
12/15/2011	USACAPOC (Fort Bragg)	Toy Drop	Images	Images	Gig Harbor Life	Fort Bragg	WA	18	<a href="#">View Item</a>
12/15/2011	USACAPOC (Fort Bragg)	Lt. Col. Gerald Ostlund	Audio	Interviews	DMA- Fort Meade	Fort Meade	MD	111	<a href="#">View Item</a>
12/15/2011	USACAPOC (Fort Bragg)	Toy drop	Images	Images	Gig Harbor Life	Fort Bragg	WA	18	<a href="#">View Item</a>
12/15/2011	USACAPOC (Fort Bragg)	Toy Drop	Images	Images	Gig Harbor Life	Fort Bragg	WA	18	<a href="#">View Item</a>
12/15/2011	USACAPOC (Fort Bragg)	Toy drop	Images	Images	Gig Harbor Life	Fort Bragg	WA	18	<a href="#">View Item</a>





12/15/2011	USACAPOC (Fort Bragg)	14th Annual Randy Oler Memorial Operation Toy Drop	Images	Images	National Guard Bureau	Fort Bragg	VA	60,600	<a href="#">View Item</a>
12/15/2011	USACAPOC (Fort Bragg)	Toy drop	Images	Images	Gig Harbor Life	Fort Bragg	WA	18	<a href="#">View Item</a>
12/15/2011	USACAPOC (Fort Bragg)	Toy drop	Images	Images	Gig Harbor Life	Fort Bragg	WA	18	<a href="#">View Item</a>
12/20/2011	USACAPOC (Fort Bragg)	Panthers, Paratroopers, Airmen Visits a Children's Hospital During the Holiday Season	Video	B-Roll	WCCB-TV	Charlotte	NC	35,000	<a href="#">View Item</a>
12/20/2011	USACAPOC (Fort Bragg)	Panthers, Paratroopers, Airmen Visits a Children's Hospital During the Holiday Season	Video	B-Roll	WTTN-TV	Washington	NC	(N/A)	<a href="#">View Item</a>
12/20/2011	USACAPOC (Fort Bragg)	Maj. Gen. Jeffrey Jacobs	Audio	Interviews	National Guard Bureau	Arlington	VA	60,600	<a href="#">View Item</a>
12/20/2011	USACAPOC (Fort Bragg)	Panthers, Paratroopers, Airmen Visits a Children's Hospital During the Holiday Season	Video	B-Roll	WSPA-TV	Spartanburg	SC	5,896	<a href="#">View Item</a>
12/20/2011	USACAPOC (Fort Bragg)	Panthers, Paratroopers, Airmen Visits a Children's Hospital During the Holiday Season	Video	B-Roll	WGHP	Greensboro	NC	32,000	<a href="#">View Item</a>
12/20/2011	USACAPOC (Fort Bragg)	Panthers, Paratroopers, Airmen Visits a Children's Hospital During the Holiday Season	Video	B-Roll	WFMY-TV	Greensboro	NC	64,000	<a href="#">View Item</a>
12/20/2011	USACAPOC (Fort Bragg)	Panthers, Paratroopers, Airmen Visits a Children's Hospital During the Holiday Season	Video	B-Roll	WSOC-TV	Charlotte	NC	(N/A)	<a href="#">View Item</a>
12/20/2011	USACAPOC (Fort Bragg)	Panthers, Paratroopers, Airmen Visits a Children's Hospital During the Holiday Season	Video	B-Roll	WCMC-FM	Raleigh	NC	(N/A)	<a href="#">View Item</a>
12/20/2011	USACAPOC (Fort Bragg)	Panthers, Paratroopers, Airmen Visits a Children's Hospital During the Holiday Season	Video	B-Roll	Charlotte Observer	Charlotte	NC	(N/A)	<a href="#">View Item</a>
12/20/2011	USACAPOC (Fort Bragg)	Panthers, Paratroopers, Airmen Visits a Children's Hospital During the Holiday Season	Video	B-Roll	WCNC-TV	Charlotte	NC	12,000	<a href="#">View Item</a>
12/20/2011	USACAPOC (Fort Bragg)	Panthers, Paratroopers, Airmen Visits a Children's Hospital During the Holiday Season	Video	B-Roll	WLOS-TV	Asheville	NC	17,000	<a href="#">View Item</a>
12/20/2011	USACAPOC (Fort Bragg)	Panthers, Paratroopers, Airmen Visits a Children's Hospital During the Holiday Season	Video	B-Roll	WYFF-TV	Greenville	SC	36,000	<a href="#">View Item</a>
12/20/2011	USACAPOC (Fort Bragg)	Panthers, Paratroopers, Airmen Visits a Children's Hospital During the Holiday Season	Video	B-Roll	News and Observer	Raleigh	NC	137,804	<a href="#">View Item</a>
12/20/2011	USACAPOC (Fort Bragg)	Panthers, Paratroopers, Airmen Visits a Children's Hospital During the Holiday Season	Video	B-Roll	WBTV-TV	Charlotte	NC	(N/A)	<a href="#">View Item</a>

12/20/2011	USACAPOC (Fort Bragg)	Panthers, Paratroopers, Airmen Visits a Children's Hospital During the Holiday Season	Video	B-Roll	WGHP-TV	High Point	NC	49,000	<a href="#">View Item</a>
12/20/2011	USACAPOC (Fort Bragg)	Maj. Gen. Jeffrey Jacobs	Audio	Interviews	DMA- Fort Meade	Fort Meade	MD	111	<a href="#">View Item</a>
12/20/2011	USACAPOC (Fort Bragg)	Panthers, Paratroopers, Airmen Visits a Children's Hospital During the Holiday Season	Video	B-Roll	WWAY-TV	Wilmington	NC	(N/A)	<a href="#">View Item</a>
12/20/2011	USACAPOC (Fort Bragg)	Panthers, Paratroopers, Airmen Visits a Children's Hospital During the Holiday Season	Video	B-Roll	WFNZ-AM	Charlotte	NC	(N/A)	<a href="#">View Item</a>
12/20/2011	USACAPOC (Fort Bragg)	Panthers, Paratroopers, Airmen Visits a Children's Hospital During the Holiday Season	Video	B-Roll	Carolina Panthers	Charlotte	NC	(N/A)	<a href="#">View Item</a>
12/20/2011	USACAPOC (Fort Bragg)	Panthers, Paratroopers, Airmen Visits a Children's Hospital During the Holiday Season	Video	B-Roll	WECT-TV	Wilmington	NC	(N/A)	<a href="#">View Item</a>
12/20/2011	USACAPOC (Fort Bragg)	Panthers, Paratroopers, Airmen Visits a Children's Hospital During the Holiday Season	Video	B-Roll	WSFX-TV	Wilmington	NC	11,658	<a href="#">View Item</a>
12/20/2011	USACAPOC (Fort Bragg)	Panthers, Paratroopers, Airmen Visits a Children's Hospital During the Holiday Season	Video	B-Roll	News & Observer	Raleigh	NC	165,483	<a href="#">View Item</a>
12/20/2011	USACAPOC (Fort Bragg)	Panthers, Paratroopers, Airmen Visits a Children's Hospital During the Holiday Season	Video	B-Roll	Twitter DVIDSports	Atlanta	GA	(N/A)	<a href="#">View Item</a>
12/21/2011	USACAPOC (Fort Bragg)	Panthers, Paratroopers, Airmen Visits a Children's Hospital During the Holiday Season	Video	B-Roll	Facebook: DVIDS	Atlanta	GA	(N/A)	<a href="#">View Item</a>
12/27/2011	USACAPOC (Fort Bragg)	Lt. Col. Gerald Ostlund	Audio	Interviews	West Point Radio		NY	40,000	<a href="#">View Item</a>
12/27/2011	USACAPOC (Fort Bragg)	Lt. Col. Gerald Ostlund	Audio	Interviews	WRNV Midshipman Radio		MD	40,000	<a href="#">View Item</a>
12/27/2011	USACAPOC (Fort Bragg)	Lt. Col. Gerald Ostlund	Audio	Interviews	KAFA-FM Air Force Radio		CO	40,000	<a href="#">View Item</a>