

Military spouses play Soldier during Jane Wayne Day



Photos by Sgt. Jonathan A. Shaw/ 1st BCT, 82nd Abn. Div. PAO

Spouses of a paratroopers 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 FIMBRES
AND SPC. 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 1998.

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

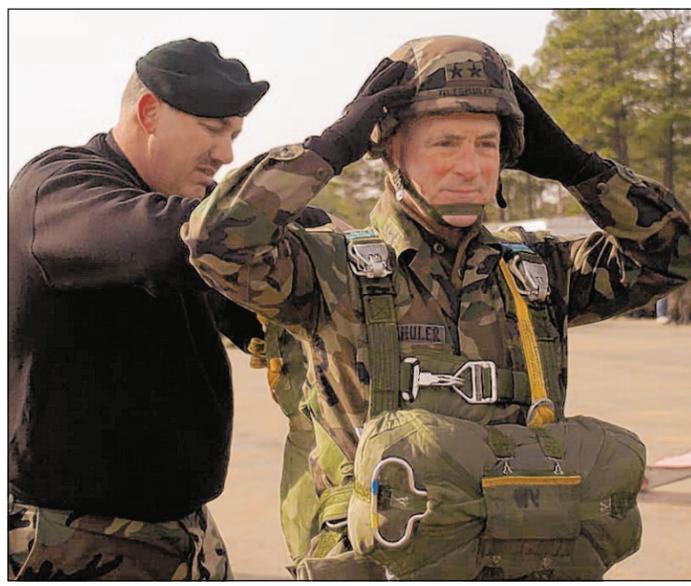


Photo courtesy of USACAPOC PAO

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

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

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 bubby, 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. 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.

14th Annual Randy Oler Memorial Operation Toy Drop

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

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 more than 50 allied jumpmasters from 11 countries.

The 14th Annual Randy Oler Memorial Operation Toy Drop is scheduled on Dec. 10 on Sicily Drop zone at 7:30 a.m., and is promised 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 Friday, 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.

McCloskey, a civil affairs specialist and retention non-commissioned officer for USACAPOC, joined the Army in 1983.

"I actually wanted to be a Marine," smiled McCloskey. "But then I saw a movie called 'A Bridge Too Far,' and I decided I wanted to be an airborne infantryman. The Marines wouldn't let me jump from planes, so I joined the Army."

"Before I PCS'd (permanent change of station) to Bragg in December of 2005, I had heard something about (Toy Drop), but not much information was given out. It wasn't really available to Soldiers outside of Fort Bragg," explained McCloskey.

"So when I got to Bragg two days before Toy Drop started. I went out there and looked at it and said 'Wow, this is an amazing event.' Since then, I've done everything I can to assist in it."

McCloskey admits that Operation Toy Drop involves a lot of personal time. People involved with the planning of Operation Toy Drop start their initial organizing of the event in February by talking about that year's operation and how it can be done. After that, many personal and professional man-hours are put into the success of a safe and profitable Operation Toy Drop.

Profitable, to USACAPOC and the Soldiers who participate in Operation Toy Drop, isn't



Photo by Spc. Katie Summerhill/USACAPOC PAO

Master Sgt. James McCloskey, left, talks with Richard Edge, the FireAntz liaison for Operation Toy Drop, about the military appreciation night in which the Fayetteville hockey team will be collecting toys from audience members to be donated to Operation Toy Drop.

about money. Profitable to them is the amount of toys donated to give a less fortunate child a holiday they deserve.

"You wake up on Christmas morning and you see the look in your own kids' faces when they see the gifts they receive, the little smiles, the look of joy from all the gifts they get," said McCloskey. "And every once in a while the Soldier who gave a gift for Toy Drop will think about some kid that they've never met and have no idea what he or she looks like, and will know that there is a kid out there with the same smile on their face because of something they did on this one day. So it means a lot."

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 wanting 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.

"The event has grown immensely, because in the past not many people outside of Fort Bragg even knew about Toy Drop. I mean, I was a part of CAPOC and didn't even know what it was. They just new that in the beginning part of December a lot of planes flew over-head, they probably thought it was another exercise," explained McCloskey. "Now that they know what it is, and who it's for, they themselves have gotten involved and support the people, the children, who are less fortunate."

"The Fayetteville FireAntz, for example, approached us last year and asked if they could do a Toy Drop of sorts on their own. Well, we don't decide what the civilian populace does, so they held it and collected a good amount of toys for us. As well as the Fort Bragg Federal Credit Union, Wilson Off Road, Buffalo Wild Wings and others, they want to have their own toy collection," added McCloskey. "They aren't doing it for us. They want to do this to make sure that the kids get the toys."

"I think people understand that Christmas is

a time of giving and that it's a time of sharing to those in need. But it's still the idea of a kid waking up to a toy. You watch any 1960s claymation Christmas movie, and it's based around a kid waking up to a new toy, not about some kid waking up to a new pair of under-roos," explained McCloskey.

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.

The first Operation Toy Drop, 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.

"To me Toy Drop is a entity. It's something that has grown from a one level idea to a skyscraper, if you will. We have come to a point in Toy Drop in which we have become a staple in the community for giving toys to the less fortunate. And there are people in our area that absolutely need it; if we don't provide these toys, they won't know what to do for Christmas," said McCloskey.

"It's an amazing feeling to see our Soldiers give so much. It gives me, especially last year; it gives me goosepimples. We had so many toys last year that we couldn't fit them inside a pax-shed ... it's an amazing feeling when you can't fit all the toys that were donated into a pax-shed where you can put a thousand Joes rigged in parachutes, but you can't get any more toys in there? It's a feeling like nothing else. You'd have to feel it to believe it, I guess."

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. 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.

"We need to ensure that after everyone in this community has retired or moved on to a new unit, that Toy Drop is still going strong," explained McCloskey. "If I wake up 20 years from now and find out Toy Drop is still going on and is bigger than ever and it's national and that more children are getting toys ... that's when you can call it a success."

Planning a big event such as the Randy Oler Memorial Operation Toy Drop takes patience, time, and well thought-out collaborations throughout the Army, the Army Reserve, the Air Force and the surrounding community. It takes a tribe to raise Operation Toy Drop, but it also involves someone taking the initiative to organize all the information, the point of contacts, and the minor details so that someone who had no clue how to run an Operation Toy Drop could pick it up and figure it out. That is what Master Sgt. James McCloskey has taken upon himself.

"My role is to be the ground liaison — basically a project manager," explained McCloskey. "I take everyone's sections and what they do, and put it into an organized chart so that when the people who plan this event move away or retire, Toy Drop doesn't fall to the wayside and that it doesn't fall apart. People will know how to run the event in the future."

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

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Shoppers will find an array of items, including holiday decorations, jewelry, Americana crafts, and homemade breads.

Proceeds from the Yule Mart benefit the OSC's Welfare Fund, which allows the organization to assist the Fort Bragg community through donations.

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INFORMATION: fbaosc.org



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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 SHARILYN 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 Krunal 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

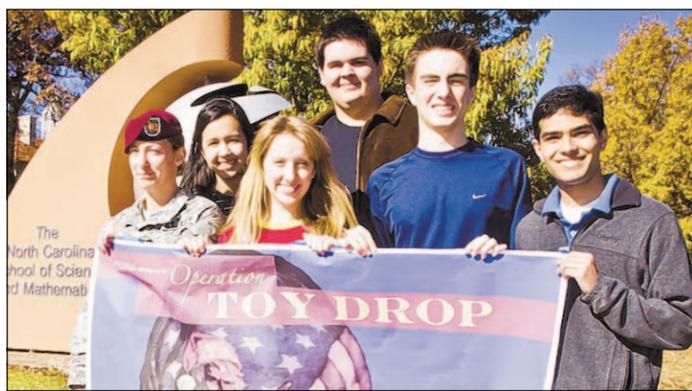


Photo by Staff Sgt. Felix R. Fimbres/USACAPOC PAO

From left to right: Staff Sgt. Christina Hippenbecker, Maye Davis, Madelaine Katz, Zack Fowler, Logan Herrera, Vipul Vachharajani 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 effect 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 FireAntz, the local hockey team. Serving the local community has been one of the major tenants 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 it's 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 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.

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

To the rescue: Blue Star Mothers help others in need

By SPC.

PAUL A. HOLSTON
XVIII ABN. CORPS PAO

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

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 instead, 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 hanger 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 momma 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: Behind the scenes of the world's largest combined airborne operation

By STAFF SGTS. SHARILYN WELLS AND FELIX FIMBRES AND SPC. KATIE SUMMERHILL
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 R. Fimbres/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.

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: A toy's story

By STAFF SGTS. SHARILYN WELLS, FELIX FIMBRES AND SPC. 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 headed 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 1998, 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 1998, 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.

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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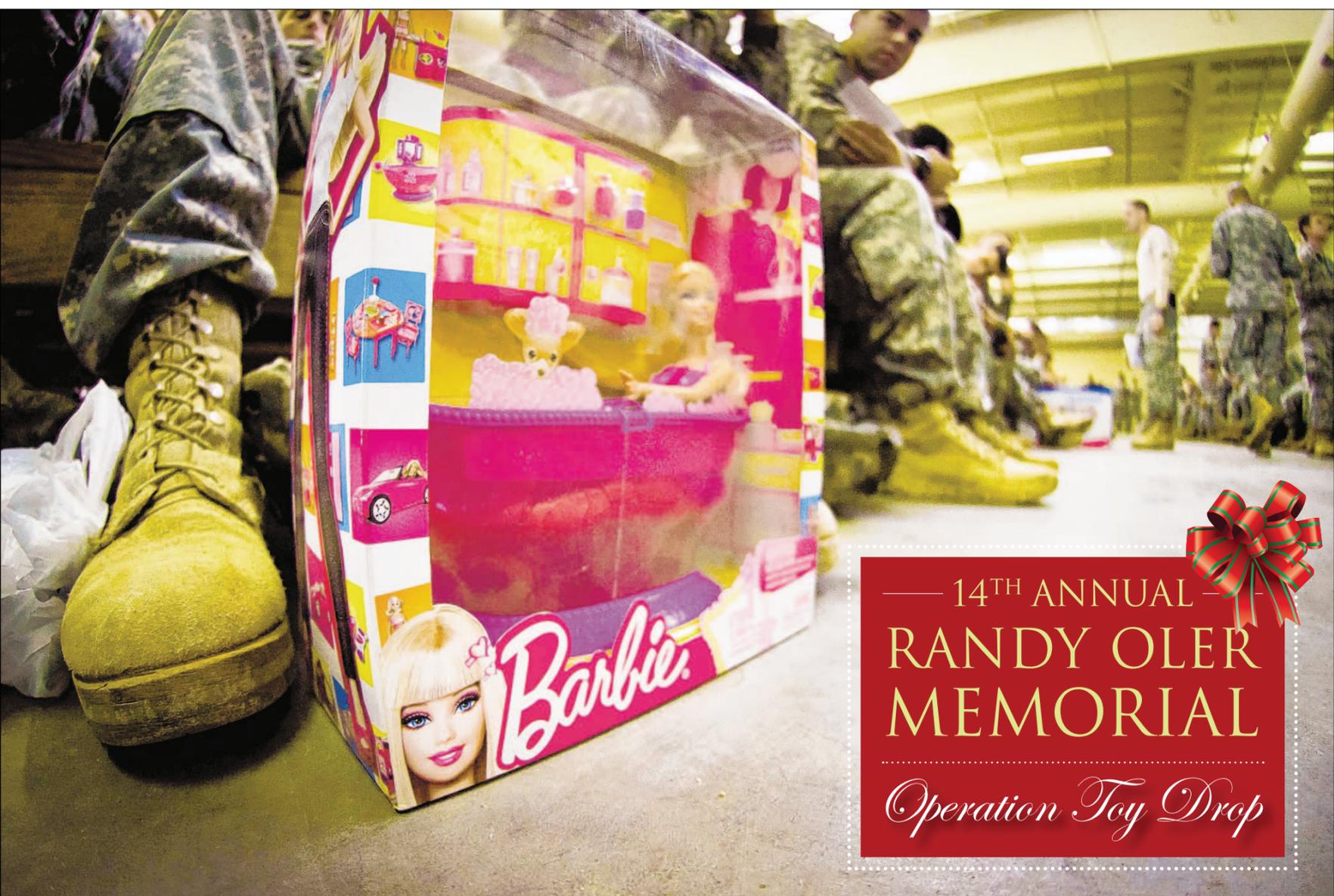
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14TH ANNUAL RANDY OLER MEMORIAL

Operation Toy Drop

Paratroopers participate in Operation Toy Drop, Dec. 9.

Photo by Staff Sgt. Felix R. Fimbres/USACAPOC PAO

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. Jermaion 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 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 1998 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 Spc. Eric Guzman/22nd MPAD

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 440th Airlift Wing and the U.S. Army Special Operations Command Flight 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. 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.