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Photo by Master Sgt. Michel Sauret, U.S. Army Reserve

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For Those Who Serve and Those Who SupportSM

AN INTERVIEW WITH

We had an opportunity to sit down and talk with Todd Weiler, former Assistant Secretary of Defense for Manpower and Reserve Affairs (M&RA), who brings more than 20 years of experience in human resource management, business, and public policy executive leadership to his office.

During his career, he has developed expertise in information technology management, strategic planning, organizational development, and business transformation and development. Notably, he served as chief executive officer of the consulting firm he founded, One Hemisphere Ventures, a company specializing in strategic and managerial consulting services to clients in the government and private sectors. In addition to his time as CEO, he held the positions of co-owner and chief operating officer of Arrowpoint Corporation and vice president for marketing and chief information officer of Communities In Schools.

Before transitioning to the private sector, Mr. Weiler served in the Army as an attack helicopter pilot. He served in both Operation Desert Shield and Operation Desert Storm where he was a part of the longest, largest air assault operation in history. Later, he served as a White House liaison to the Department of Defense and was appointed by the President to the Department of Transportation Civil Tiltrotor Committee and the Federal Prison Industries Board of Directors. Weiler further developed his expertise in military personnel and wounded warrior programs as the Deputy Assistant Secretary of the Army for Manpower and Reserve Affairs.

Looking back over your career, what elements—policies, human resources, personal convictions, etc.—may have had an impact on opportunities to advance in your career?

Weiler: I will always remember the way my mother raised her three boys ... care about others and always give in service. I have tried to follow those lessons in public and private life. I have been fortunate to lead many initiatives, but I think my work in leading companies has made the biggest impact on my work in the public sector. I believe that business experience and leading teams are critical to making good public policy, especially when you are dealing with enterprises like M&RA, which encompass worldwide operations (exchanges, commissaries, and schools). A good business sense is critical to making the right judgments on business operations and leading large groups of people.

What has changed during your career in terms of diversity and acceptance?

Weiler: I remember being in the Gulf War, and I was so scared that I would be “out’d”. In those days, being gay was a one-way ticket out of the Service. I think this is one of the biggest changes. This is an example where the Department of Defense (DoD) followed corporate America and society. There are other examples where DoD has led. I think our recent changes in transgender policy and opening combat positions to women are great examples of leading change.



Todd A. Weiler speaks with Crossroads Elementary students during a visit to Marine Corps Base Quantico (MCBQ), Va., Dec. 12, 2016. Weiler met with military and civilian leadership from MCBQ to better understand base operations. (Photo by Lance Cpl. Cristian L. Ricardo, U.S. Marine Corps)

What remains as opportunities to diminish or dissolve barriers, perceived or actual, to the full engagement in the military community of all qualified members of society?

Weiler: We must do a better job of connecting with society. Today, we are still largely disconnected from large swaths of the geographic, demographic, and socioeconomic society. This has been a major push for me – making our military more reflective of the society we serve. We can accomplish a great deal of this by engaging our communities more through various outreach or external relations efforts. For example, the National Guard Youth Challenge and Starbase programs reach youth with vital programs and although these young people may never serve in the military, they will always have a positive impression of the work we do and who we are. I also believe that there remain barriers in the form of traditional Reserve service. I envision a future where more robust part-time service is the norm. This might be in the form of half-time, 15-20 hours/week, or weeks on followed by weeks off. This is how we will partner with the commercial sector to meet their needs, our needs, and the needs of our Service members that are part of an American

society that is ever-evolving. Work-life balance, new opportunities to learn, and rotate career fields, etc.; these are all societal shifts that we must address.

What are your hopes for the incoming administration in terms of inclusiveness and continuing a path toward diversity in the military?

Weiler: The work we have done is not about a social experiment, as I have heard some suggest. It is about creating a Defense Department that is more reflective of the society we serve. Failure to do so, or rolling back the policies we have implemented, runs the risk of creating a military that is further disconnected. That is how we get into conflicts that the American people do not support – when we fail to have an America with a “stake in the game”. I am confident that the new DoD leadership will recognize this and I am confident in the career and military leaders to educate them as they enter their jobs.

What does an emphasis on diversity provide in terms of

opportunities for the DoD?

Weiler: Diverse organizations are always more powerful, because they reflect their constituents, whether in business or in the military. A strong military must reflect the diverse American fabric. That is how we maintain the world’s strongest fighting force. When you have organizations that are diverse, the opportunities for individuals are limitless and that is what I see on a daily basis in business and in our military.

Is there anything you would like to add, or is there anything you’d like to say directly to the Guard and Reserve community?

Weiler: You reflect America. You are in the communities that we serve. You are our front line in connecting and building a Force of the Future – a force that is a mirror of our great Nation. My heart has always been with you, our community-based forces, and it will remain so in my time away from the Pentagon. Thank you for your service to country and community!





AN INTERVIEW WITH JOURNALIST

If you watched this year's Freedom Award ceremony, you may have remembered when the Master of Ceremonies, Jonathan Elias, casually called the Secretary of Defense, Ash Carter, up to the stage for a "selfie."

An award-winning journalist and anchor at ABC7/WJLA-TV, Elias joins the Guard and Reserve Support Network to talk about his long career covering and reporting stories around the country, including the Boston Marathon bombings, Hurricane Katrina, and the Washington D.C. sniper case.

The first question is – and we have to ask this – at what point during the Freedom Award ceremony did you make the decision to leave the script and call up the Secretary of Defense (SecDef) for a photo?

Elias: You know what? A lot of the time scripts are just guidelines: They kind of tell you where you need to go. If you're not really comfortable in your own skin, then you'll rely on that script 100 percent. A lot of the time, I will just kind of read what's happening with the crowd, with the room, and the people.

I just thought it would be kind of fun to get a picture with the SecDef, and time was slipping away. I was supposed to end the speech at that point with, "Everybody stand; it's time to say goodbye," and the SecDef seemed to be having a good time. He was all smiles, and he was so appreciative, that I didn't think he'd have a problem in the world with it. And he didn't. I could tell. If he was a different sort I would have read that, and I probably would not have done that! (Laughing).

You obviously have an affinity for the military and the military community. What led you to become active in supporting Service members and their families?

Elias: Well, let's see. I think it was when I was a kid. I used to wear my dad's soft caps to school when I was in second grade, and I just always had an appreciation for the military. I always looked up and always respected the military. At one point, I wanted to go in. I wanted to fly jets in the Air Force, but that didn't work out so well. My math skills are horrible, plus I'm 6'1", and there was a Colonel in the Air Force who told me, "You know, for some of the planes they fly—the 16s, 15s—you'd be a little cramped." (Laughing). So, it didn't work out for a variety of reasons.

But, I'll never forget it: I was sitting at home, maybe twelve or thirteen years ago, and I was sitting there watching that HBO special about an ER (emergency room) in Iraq. All the doctors and nurses were trying to patch together our kids that were being shot and blown up with IEDs (improvised explosive devices). I think the one thing I was touched by watching that special was that their warrior spirit wasn't damaged the slightest.

And I thought to myself: You know what? We need to do something about that. We need to celebrate that spirit, because that's really what defines us and makes us different than others around the world.

I remember I got together with some friends of mine who were CEOs of companies, whether it was a steak house or an airline, such as Jonathan Ornstein with Mesa Air. I sat down with all these guys, and I said, "Hey, we should really put together a ceremony to help get these guys back into civilian life, because the military doesn't have the best way of transitioning folks from the front lines to civilian life. It's a very difficult transition. A lot of these guys are suffering with all kinds of things that we really can't even imagine; PTSD (post-traumatic stress disorder) is just touching it. There's a lot more going on. Some of these guys are young, and they've seen horrific things."

So, I came up with the idea of having a Welcome Home Project where, literally, all we would do is shake their hand, give them a hug, and get a bunch of strangers together – citizens – just to say, "Thank you for your service; welcome home." We wanted them to know they were

appreciated and know what they did was valuable. It ended up becoming much bigger. Each gift basket we gave contained gift certificates. There were two airline tickets to anywhere Mesa Air flew, there were steak house gift certificates, a VISA card for a couple hundred bucks, car washes, and there were gift certificates for a grocery store. It was basically a basket filled with all kinds of gift certificates returning vets would find helpful.

We specialized in the welcoming home Purple Heart recipients, because I wanted to go after those folks who suffered and sacrificed in a different way than others – I wanted them to know especially. And we care about all veterans, but I really wanted Purple Heart recipients to know the sacrifice they made out in the field is not forgotten. We wanted them to know that people here not only love them and respect them, but that we're just happy they're one of us.

It went over big. I'll never forget this Navy Corpsman who was maybe 23-years-old. I can't even imagine what he saw, because he got a Purple Heart when a grenade went off when he was patching up some people.

And then I thought, "This is the coolest thing ever." If all it takes is us to say, "Thank you," and give them a handshake, then it's absolutely well worth it. So, that kind of got me down the road.

Long story short, I did one for 53 or 54 Purple Heart recipients on one day in front of my television station and hundreds of people showed up. We had a fly-over, we had Senator McCain, Senator Kyl, and Governor Napolitano – they all came up to speak.

At that ceremony, there was a young man who was disfigured badly – burned – and I got a letter in the mail from his Colonel weeks later thanking me and saying that that ceremony – telling them, "Welcome home," accepting them back, and telling them they were valued – put the Service member on a different path. The Colonel had been concerned about him. He really cared about this guy, and he was invested. He said it changed his path.

He said, "You may see it as something as trivial as shaking hands, but I'm telling you, it's changing the game."

He invited me to the U.S. Army War College to go through the DDE (Department of Distance Education) program with his group – his seminar group – and I ended up doing that. I accepted the offer. I went there. I had an amazing time, and I ended up being tapped by their Chief of Staff for curriculum for the DDE program at the time. He said, "You know, this is a one-way conversation, and next year you're coming back to the college, and you'll be in a teaching role." (Laughing).

You don't argue with Colonels when they're telling you it's a one-way conversation.

I've been doing it now going on my eighth year, and I've got to be honest: It's one of the highlights of my year going up to Carlyle for a whole week of teaching.

You've gotten at this as you've shared with us, but if you had to boil it down to one thing, what would you say is the most satisfying part of what you do to support those Service members?

Elias: I think the most satisfying thing I can do is bring a smile to a Service member's face with an understanding that what they do means a lot, not just to me but to a lot of people out there – I'd say a majority of people out there. If I can just do that for one moment, then it's all worth it.

As you know, ESGR works with Service members and veterans who are either trying to get better jobs or find their first job as

they transition off active duty. As somebody who has worked in a variety of locations and places in the civilian workforce, what quick tips could you give a Service member or veteran as they're starting to look for a civilian career?

Elias: I think the best thing to do, especially for a veteran looking for a job, is just be yourself. I think there is a lot of cache that goes along with being someone who has served. The simple reason is this: My son was looking at West Point – he's a great wrestler – he was looking at West Point and comparing it to some other schools.

He ended up going to ASU (Arizona State University) – which is a good school – but I told him, "Son, here's the way it works in the real world: When you go in for a job interview, you put your resume down, and it says ASU or Penn State, that's great. Good schools. But, if you put down West Point there is a level of sacrifice and there is a level of service that goes along with that. There's a level of maturity and commitment that comes from that." I think that means so much more to employers in this day and age.

So, the fact that you served in any capacity – if you're flying an \$89 million aircraft or if you're servicing a \$50 million tank, whatever it is – there is a level of service and sacrifice that goes along with being a veteran that translates and means so much in the private sector.

We see Millennials coming out of school with levels of expectation far exceeding what their skill level is going to allow, and we see this desire for some of these kids to want to do things that they're not trained for.

And here come these veterans who served four, six, or eight years, and they have been doing jobs that, to them, they could do in their sleep, which is worth gold in the private sector.

That sacrifice, that commitment, that discipline, those are all qualities that really makes these guys and

gals top-flight candidates for any job in the private sector. When you say to somebody in the military – I don't care what rank – "I need this done by Friday," they're going to get it done by Friday. Most times they'll get it done by Thursday.

As we've gotten to know you and appreciate you, we want to know a little bit about what's going on with you. What's next for Jonathan Elias? What personal and professional goals are you working on that you want to see come to fruition?

Elias: Well, I've got to be honest with you: I have done a bit of travelling. I've spent some time all over the country here and there. And – knock on wood – I'm very thankful that I've never been fired from a job. I usually leave either because I get antsy, bored, or they hire a boss I don't necessarily agree with – life is too short to be miserable.

You've got to be happy in this life because it's not a dress rehearsal. Right now, truth be told, I'm pacing myself. I couldn't be happier. I'm having so much fun with my job; I work with and for amazing people, and I'm not saying that because we're being recorded. I'm a tad bit honest when it comes to stuff like that.

I couldn't ask for much more; my kids are both in college, and we're empty nesting. My wife and I are having a great time. I wake up every morning, and I thank goodness I'm living this life.

My dad always gave me sound advice. He always said, "Keep your head where your butt is, and you'll never have a problem." You know those people who are always wondering what's next and worrying about where they should be instead of where they are? They end up wasting away.

"You don't argue with Colonels when they tell you it's a ONE-WAY conversation."





Photo by Steve Turner, DoD

DoD RECOGNIZES OUTSTANDING FAMILY PROGRAMS

Matthew Dubois, Deputy Assistant Secretary of Defense for Reserve Integration, will host the 2016 Department of Defense Reserve Family Readiness Awards presentation at 10:00 a.m., Friday, March 24, 2017, at the Pentagon Hall of Heroes.

The award recognizes the National Guard and Reserve units, one from each of the seven Reserve Components, with the very best programs to support their military families. Representatives from each of the winning units will be in attendance and receive a commemorative plaque and framed certificate from Mr. Dubois. Each unit will also receive a certificate of recognition and award from the Military Officers Association of America.

This year's winners are:

- Army National Guard - 155th Engineer Company (Vertical), Rapid City, SD
Unit Commander: CPT David Dodson
- Army Reserve - 461st Engineer Company(Horizontal), Fargo, ND
Unit Commander: CPT Richard Osterberg
- Marine Corps Reserve - Marine Air Control Group 48, 4th Marine Aircraft Wing, Great Lakes, IL
Unit Commander: Col Paul Weaver
- Navy Reserve - Navy Operational Support Center San Jose, San Jose, CA
Unit Commander: CDR Amy Hunt
- Air National Guard - 123rd Airlift Wing, Louisville, KY
Unit Commander: Col David Mounkes
- Air Force Reserve - 434th Air Refueling Wing, Grissom Air Reserve Base, IN
Unit Commander: Col Lorenza Shaw
- Coast Guard Reserve - Port Security Unit 307, Clearwater, FL
Unit Commander: CDR Eric Bernstein

The Department of Defense Reserve Family Readiness Awards program was established in 2000 to recognize the top unit in each of the Reserve Components. Family readiness programs are a vital link in the support networks for Reserve Component families and are particularly important as our Nation relies on National Guard and Reserve members to support and serve in critical missions worldwide. Family readiness has proven to be a key component of mission readiness, and robust family readiness programs enhance the ability to sustain and deploy National Guard and Reserve units.



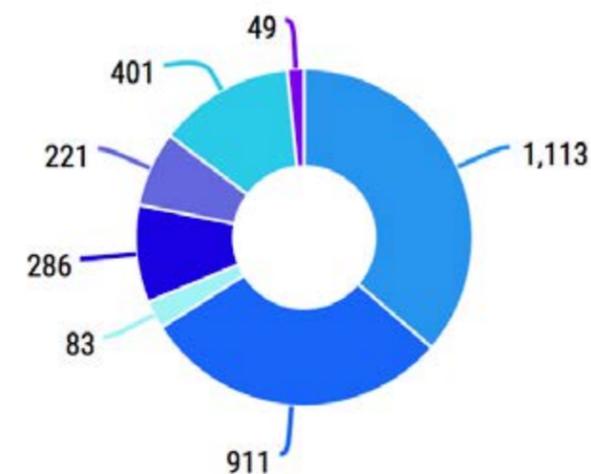
2017 FREEDOM AWARD SEASON NUMBERS

Nominations by State



Total Nominations: 3,064

Service Nominations

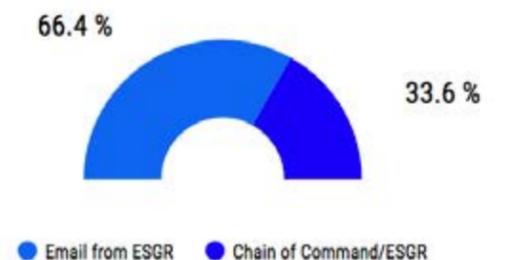


- Army National Guard
- Army Reserve
- Marine Forces Reserve
- Navy Reserve
- Air National Guard
- Air Force Reserve
- Coast Guard Reserve

Top Five States



Top Awareness Mediums





YOUR STORY IS OUR STORY

Since its inception, the Yellow Ribbon Reintegration Program has reflected the faces of every segment of society, and has continued to evolve to meet the needs of its broad and diverse community. We are interested in getting first-hand accounts from Reserve Component members who have been helped by YRRP. In the coming months, we would like to highlight your stories on the Guard and Reserve Support Network.

If you have deployed multiple times, are a single parent, a woman who has deployed, or a member of the LGBTQ community or any community that adds to the rich fabric of the Reserve Component and have a story to tell, please consider allowing us to share it with your peers. There may be others in your shoes who could benefit from your experiences. Your identity will remain anonymous if you choose. If not, we invite you to provide us with a photo.

If you have a story but are not sure of how to get it down on paper, consider this template as a guide:

- Introduce yourself—name, rank, unit
- Where did you/do you serve?
- What aspects of Guard and Reserve life did you find difficult to navigate?
- How did you manage or overcome those roadblocks?
- Advice to others?

We're looking forward to hearing from you. Please send your stories to YRRP@osd.mil

