

## Accomplished leader, devoted father moves on

Written by Illinois National Guard PAO  
Monday, 17 March 2014 07:52

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Sherman colonel retiring after 32 years of service; Story by U.S. Army Capt. Randy Dill, 139th Mobile Public Affairs Detachment

SPRINGFIELD, IL (03/12/2014)(readMedia)-- Col. Thomas J. Weiss, of Sherman, Ill., is moving to his next chapter of leadership after serving 32 years in the Illinois Army National Guard. Some people may think after more than three decades in the military Weiss would retire, but he is continuing his service in a different form.

"I am going back to teaching, maybe JROTC (Junior Reserve Officer Training Corps) and working my way up the ladder to be a principal," said Weiss.

Less than three weeks after leaving his full-time job with the Illinois National Guard, Weiss accepted a job teaching chemistry at Manual High School in Peoria, Ill. He is also working toward a degree in school administration from the University of Illinois.

Weiss' career in the Army is marked by multiple roles, goals and numerous achievements. Weiss enlisted in the Illinois Army National Guard in 1982 as a combat medic. He completed the Illinois Army National Guard's Officer Candidate School and commissioned as an infantry officer June 9, 1985. He also completed Army Ranger school in 1987 after being told it was impossible for a National Guard officer to complete one of the Army's toughest competitive

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training programs.

"[Weiss is] one of the hardest working staff officers in the Illinois Army National Guard," said Col. Michael Haerr of Eurkea, Ill., the director of logistics for the Illinois Army National Guard. "He was working to support junior leaders and Soldiers with the training opportunities they needed to be successful in support of our state and nation's defense. He never forgot who he worked for."

Weiss graduated from the University of Illinois with a bachelor's degree in chemistry and a master's degree in business administration. In addition, he earned a master's degree in strategic studies from the U.S. Army War College. Weiss also gained his credentials as a certified high school teacher, a private pilot and a certified scuba diver.

"Colonel Weiss always wore many hats," said Brig. Gen. Johnny R. Miller of Tamms, Ill., Assistant Adjutant General – Army, Illinois National Guard. "He has been a go-to guy we can rely on to perform and deliver countless times in many different functions."

Prior to his military retirement, Weiss served concurrently as the commander of the 129th Regiment, Regional Training Institute at Camp Lincoln, Springfield, Ill., and as the deputy chief of staff for operations for the Illinois Army National Guard.

Within three years of holding these two roles, the Illinois Officer Candidate School program became one of the largest in the nation, while the individual Soldier qualification rate for Illinois rose from the 50th percentile to the 98th in the nation.

Weiss said one of his proudest accomplishments outside the Army was working with Sherman-Williamsville schools to establish the first youth wrestling program in the district. By working with the school superintendent, principal and school board he developed a co-op with Riverton providing the opportunity for the high school to also have a wrestling program.

Weiss compared his passion for wrestling with that of being a Soldier. His wife, Christie Weiss, went a little further to describe his drive.

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"Tom is one of the most driven people I know," said Christie. "If he is passionate about something he will make it a success. This drive is who he is. Anything he touches and puts his mind to becomes a success."

Weiss and his wife have six children, two daughters and four sons. Despite his active military life, he made time to coach each of his children, while also getting involved with his sons' Cub Scout and Boy Scout programs.

When asked what advice he gives to the Army's future leaders going through officer training, the message is simple: "Don't quit."

Weiss recalls telling officer candidates the Army is counting on them to make it through training and become a future leader in the Illinois Army National Guard. He told candidates to stick it out and the training would change them forever.

Weiss' children echo the same mantra when asked what advice their father gave them while growing up.

"Throughout my life, my dad has shared words of advice and encouragement to help me through tough times," said Sara VanDerWal of Springfield, Ill., Weiss' second daughter. "These include: 'Weiss' don't quit,' 'you can't live your life in fear,' 'sprint to the finish,' and many more."

Just as he offered words of support and encouragement to his own family, he is quick to attribute his career in the Army to the mentors he had along the way.

"I love being a Soldier. It is easy to work hard at something you love to do," said Weiss. "I was very fortunate to have several mentors who provided me guidance and direction throughout my career."

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His mentors are equally quick to compliment Weiss and recognize his hard work.

"Colonel Weiss is a consummate professional," said Miller. "He has done everything the Army has asked of him and then some. [He is] one of the best operations officers I've ever seen."

His eldest son, Jacob, is a cadet at the United States Military Academy at West Point and adheres to a lesson his dad taught him at a young age.

"Groups are like strings. You can't get them to do anything by pushing from the back. They just get bunched up. You have to pull from the front and be a leader to get things to happen," Jacob said. "When something needs to get done, I revert back to this piece of knowledge."

Weiss' retirement ceremony is March 22. He said he hopes his 32 years of service will leave a lasting impression on the organization.

"You can learn something from every leader," Weiss said to his son. "They all have lessons to give, but you still have to execute and get the job done."