



**PRESS RELEASE
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Alaska National Guard dedicates Kotzebue hangar to retired Maj. Gen. John Schaeffer, Jr.

JOINT BASE ELMENDORF-RICHARDSON, Alaska — The Alaska National Guard dedicated the Army Guard's aviation hangar in Kotzebue to retired Maj. Gen. John Schaeffer, Jr. at the facility in the small Northwest Alaskan community, Aug. 9.

Alaska Department of Military and Veterans Affairs and Alaska National Guard leadership honored Schaeffer and his family in a community-wide ceremony to celebrate his many contributions to the DMVA, AKNG and state of Alaska.

"The real indication of your importance to the people of Kotzebue, Northwest Arctic, and all of Alaska is written in the hearts of Alaskans everywhere," said Brig. Gen. Laurie Hummel, AKNG adjutant general and DMVA commissioner, during her remarks at the ceremony.

Schaeffer has a long and distinguished career in both the military and civilian sectors. Born and raised in Kotzebue, Schaeffer enlisted in the Alaska Army National Guard in 1957, joining the Eskimo Scouts. The Eskimo Scouts were a unique and relevant resource, treasured by the Alaska National Guard as a group who was particularly skilled to guard and protect Western Alaska and respond to any potential threats in the Arctic region during the World War II era, and continuing until the mid-90s.

After the Alaska Native Claims Settlement Act of 1971, Schaeffer became the first president and CEO of NANA Regional Corporation, and served for 14 years. In 1986, he was elected mayor of the Northwest Arctic Borough, however was appointed as adjutant general shortly thereafter by Governor Steve Cowper. Schaeffer also served on the first Alaska Natives Commission and was a long-time member of Northwest Alaska's Regional Elder Counsel.

Schaeffer was the nation's first Inupiaq Eskimo two-star general and served in his role as adjutant general from 1986 to 1991.

Schaeffer and his wife, Mary, live in Kotzebue, where they have been long-time volunteers dedicated to preserving and fostering the Inupiaq culture and language. They have nine children and 36 grandchildren, many of whom were able to attend the facility dedication in the Guard's UH-60 Black Hawk hangar. The hangar sits on the edge of Kotzebue, on a peninsula that extends into the Arctic's Chukchi Sea, about 550 miles from Anchorage.

Many local residents were present at the dedication ceremony, joining a number of out-of-town guests, including Governor Bill Walker.

Governor Walker spoke about the contributions Maj. Gen. Schaeffer has made to the state in the past 60 years, expressing his level of respect and admiration for the Alaskan leader.

"This is as good as it gets, to be able to recognize appropriately, honoring an incredible Alaskan, and incredible American for all he has done for his state and his country," Gov. Walker said. "Alaska can survive whatever comes our way because of people like General Schaeffer."

Brig. Gen. Hummel, was thrilled about the opportunity to honor such a loved and respected figure in the Alaska Native community.

"I know your positive influence is held dear by every single person here," she said to Schaeffer during the ceremony.

In addition to the governor and adjutant general, 11 local leaders and family members spoke at the event, including one of Schaeffer's granddaughters, Keegan Richards.

"His list of achievements is vast and I appreciate you all for touching on them," said Richards to those who spoke of her grandfather.

"To my papa, my hero, the impact you've made in my life can't be put into words," continued Richards. "I admire, love and respect you unconditionally; your acts of service, leadership and kindness are what got you this honor and I can't think of anyone more deserving," she said.

The dedication of the aviation facility marked, not only the recognition and celebration of a hometown hero, but a tangible and lasting way to honor a lifelong Alaskan who has made a significant impact on the state of Alaska, and a champion for the Native Alaskan community and rural Alaska as a whole.

Brig. Gen. Hummel unveiled a mock plaque, in place of the actual bronze plaque that will be placed on the outside of the building.

"We are proud to extend this small token of our esteem to name this facility in your honor," she said. "It is my pleasure to officially name this the 'Major General John W. Schaeffer, Jr. (retired) Army Aviation Operations Facility.'"

The facility will be called the Qipqiña Hangar, after Schaeffer's Inupiaq name.

After the ceremony, visitors and guests joined together in a community potluck, which included local favorites such as muktuk—the skin and blubber of a whale; Eskimo ice cream—a concoction of animal lard, blueberries and sometimes meat or fish; and caribou stew, along with more familiar favorites like pasta salad and chocolate chip cookies.

"This event—the dedication ceremony and the potluck—was an wonderful opportunity to show General Schaeffer and the people of Kotzebue that we value them, we care about what they care about, and that we simply enjoy getting to know them better," said Hummel.

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PHOTOS and links, next page

PHOTOS

1. **Attached pdf** includes story and a small selection of low-resolution photos for viewing on screen.
2. **Flickr link** includes an event album with the complete selection of full-resolution, free downloadable images. (Flickr is not generally accessible from .mil computers.)

<https://www.flickr.com/photos/alaskanationalguard/albums/72157672263403966>

3. **DVIDS link** includes story and selected full-resolution photos, free downloadable images. (Primarily for media, DVIDS is accessible from .mil computers.)

<https://www.dvidshub.net/news/207015/alaska-national-guard-dedicates-kotzebue-hangar-retired-maj-gen-john-schaeffer-jr>

4. **DVIDS B-roll video link** <https://www.dvidshub.net/video/479161/alaska-national-guard-honors-retired-maj-gen-john-schaeffer>



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Retired Maj. Gen. John W. Schaeffer, Jr., former adjutant general of the Alaska National Guard, and his wife, Mary, are celebrated during a naming and dedication ceremony of the Army National Guard aviation facility in Kotzebue, Alaska, August 9, 2016. Schaeffer served as the adjutant general of the Alaska National Guard from 1986 to 1991. The facility, Qipqĩña Hangar, is dedicated to Schaeffer in his Iñupiaq name. (U.S. Army National Guard photo by Staff Sgt. Balinda O'Neal Dresel)



160809-Z-CA180-118

Alaska Gov. Bill Walker speaks during a naming and dedication ceremony of the Army National Guard aviation facility in honor of retired Maj. Gen. John W. Schaeffer, Jr., in Kotzebue, Alaska, August 9, 2016. Schaeffer served as the adjutant general of the Alaska National Guard from 1986 to 1991. The facility, Qipqĩña Hangar, is dedicated to Schaeffer in his Iñupiaq name. (U.S. Army National Guard photo by Staff Sgt. Balinda O'Neal Dresel)

160809-Z-CA180-136

Mrs. Mary Schaeffer, wife of retired Maj. Gen. John W. Schaeffer, Jr., and Brig. Gen. Laurie Hummel, the adjutant general of the Alaska National Guard, unveil a paper replica of the plaque that will hang on the Army National Guard aviation facility during a naming and dedication ceremony in Kotzebue, Alaska, August 9, 2016. The facility is dedicated to the former adjutant general of the Alaska National Guard, Maj. Gen. John W. Schaeffer, Jr., in his Iñupiaq name, Qipqĩña. (U.S. Army National Guard photo by Staff Sgt. Balinda O'Neal Dresel)



Photos below courtesy of the Schaeffer family

