

# WI National Guard: Two game-changers inducted into Wisconsin Air Guard Hall of Fame

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MADISON, Wis. — The Wisconsin Air National Guard inducted two celebrated retirees into its Hall of Fame Sept. 22 at the 115th Fighter Wing, Truax Field.

The 40th annual induction ceremony included Brig. Gen. Margaret “Peg” Bair, former Wisconsin Air National Guard chief of staff and the Wisconsin Air National Guard’s first female general officer; and Col. Jeffrey “Ace” Wiegand, former commander of the 115th Fighter Wing as well as former Wisconsin Air National Guard chief of staff.

The Wisconsin Air National Guard Hall of Fame recognizes personnel who served above and beyond what would normally be considered outstanding or exemplary. Inductees are recognized for their sustained exceptional duty performance, innovation, enhancement of combat effectiveness and enhancement of public support for the Wisconsin Air National Guard. Additionally, their service must bring great credit to the state, nation and the Wisconsin Air National Guard.

Brig. Gen. David May, Wisconsin’s deputy adjutant general for Air, cited an adjutant general who served 100 years before the Wisconsin Air National Guard Hall of Fame began to explain why Bair and Wiegand met that criteria.

“I believe that the heritage of this organization is rooted in visionary thinking, followed by action, resulting in a great impact,” May said. “The leaders that continue to emerge from our ranks embody this mindset.”

May said that Wisconsin Adjutant General Chandler Chapman, who served from

1882 to 1889, established a visionary standard by putting in place the means to prepare the state militia's transformation into a state national guard.

"In hindsight, it would appear that Gen. Chapman was looking over the horizon," May said. "And in true Wisconsin form, he set out to make sure we were leading, and not reacting, to this massive change eventually captured in the Militia Act of 1903. Wisconsin was later recognized as one of only a small number of states fully ready for this transition. He had a vision, took action, and the impact was enormous."

May first met both Bair and Wiegand during his first drill with the Wisconsin Air National Guard in 2009. And while May initially struggled to understand the differences between a chief of staff, director of staff and deputy adjutant general for Air, he did not fail to recognize how capably Bair led her staff as well as how well she synchronized the Air staff with a relatively young Joint Staff.

"Navigating the demands of service requirements and the mission of the Joint Staff was likely no small feat," May said. "But from my perspective, it was working quite well. Bair's steady hand and common-sense approach to everything we were doing allowed us to get quite a bit done on our limited Guard drill time."

As a registered nurse, Bair was commissioned by direct appointment into the U.S. Air Force in 1976. She joined the Air Force Reserve in 1981, continuing to serve as a clinical nurse. She joined the Montana Air National Guard in 1986, and the Wisconsin Air National Guard in 1994 as a member of the 128th Medical Squadron. In 2005 she assumed command of the 128th Medical Group, and began her role as Wisconsin Air National Guard chief of staff in 2008.

May recalled how Bair made time for her staff to accomplish their annual training requirements, and how she championed the growth and development of the Joint Force Headquarters.

"She pursued opportunities to grow the state's evolving formal force development program by seeking opportunities to formalize headquarters staff outreach, and encouraging assignments between states," May explained. "These efforts included stalwart mentoring of our Airmen — specifically, ensuring our female Airmen felt confident in following her lead.

"Brig. Gen. Bair embraced her role as an influential leader," May continued, "and

engaged other female Airmen as a mentor to ensure inclusion would continue to grow in the Wisconsin National Guard to guarantee that we were accepting the diversity of thought and the diversity of talent that we so badly needed to maintain and improve our competitive edge.”

May pointed out that the Wisconsin Air National Guard today is 26 percent female, which is about six percent higher than the Air National Guard and the Air Force. Further, over the past two years females have made up 28 percent of new recruits, and four of the Wisconsin Air National Guard’s 11 colonels are women.

“My director of staff and my state command chief are both women,” May said, “as well as numerous field grade officers and senior noncommissioned officers throughout this organization. Directly and indirectly, you widened and smoothed out a path for those who followed you,” he said to Bair. “Old biases have been challenged and pushed aside as we seek the right talent everywhere it can be found, and we are a better organization for it.

“So, Gen. Bair, we thank you for your vision, action and impact.”

Bair offered a joyous and animated response to her induction.

“Wow — what fun!” she exclaimed. “I just want to say ‘thank you’ to everyone. All the experiences that I’ve had, all the people that I’ve met, everyone that has touched me — from the deepest part of me, I say thank you.”

May said his appreciation for Wiegand’s leadership began as the Wisconsin Air National Guard assembled a medical attachment for the Wisconsin National Guard’s CERFP (an enhanced response force package for chemical, biological, radiological, nuclear and high-explosive contingencies), as well as a joint implement site communication capability team and the fatality search and rescue team within the 115th Fighter Wing.

“Col. Wiegand clearly saw the long game in building these capabilities,” May said. “I can’t imagine going through the last few years without them, I really can’t.”

May explained that the CERFP medical detachment played a significant role in the Wisconsin National Guard’s support of the state response to COVID-19, the communication team has supported hurricane relief efforts in Puerto Rico, and the Fatality Search and Rescue Team was essential in recovering Maj. Durwood “Hawk”

Jones after a fatal crash in Hiawatha National Park in Michigan's Upper Peninsula.

May said people might be more familiar with Wiegand's role in helping the 115th Fighter Wing compete for the opportunity to convert to the F-35 Lightning fighter jet.

"Col. Wiegand clearly saw what needed to be done long ago for the Fighter Wing to be competitive and set about taking action," May said. "Specifically, creating partners, building a coalition and galvanizing focus within the Wing and the entire Wisconsin National Guard to methodically campaign for the desired outcome of being just the second Air National Guard unit to convert to the F-35.

"He cultivated partners at all levels, but recognized that community support was essential," May continued. "He drove the creation of the Badger Air Community Council, paving the way for a local galvanization of support and understanding into this effort — an organization that today remains a vibrant part of the Fighter Wing."

May also credited Wiegand with inspiring Volk Field's efforts to become a counterland training center, which aided Volk Field with hosting the Northern Lightning exercises and improved the 115th Fighter Wing's chances of gaining the F-35 mission.

"A drop of infectious vision was all it took," May said.

Wiegand acknowledged that pursuing the F-35 mission was never just about the 115th Fighter Wing.

"There are three [Air National Guard] bases in Wisconsin," Wiegand said. "We made sure our strategic plan included the stability and relevance of Volk Field and Milwaukee. That counterland center of excellence was so critical, and it was an opportunity that we could not miss. Volk Field is recognized as a high-value national training asset, and that's fortunate because it's right in the Fighter Wing's backyard."

Wiegand said that in 2010 the 115th Fighter Wing had long-term stability, relevance and viability for at least another decade with a homeland defense mission. But it also had what at that time was a 25-year-old aircraft in the F-16 Block 30, and at some point that fighter jet would be retired from service.

"This was not a time to be complacent," Wiegand said.

Wiegand, Brig. Gen. Erik Peterson — then a colonel, but now the Wisconsin Air National Guard chief of staff — and a handful of other now retired Wisconsin Air National Guard senior officers developed a vision, a strategy and a roadmap to become the next Air National Guard unit to fly the F-35 Lightning fighter jet. What they lacked initially was support.

“We knew that, based on the objective criteria, we were one of the top choices,” Wiegand said. “There were 16 bases identified in the first round, but this was not going to be a fair fight. It was going to be a dogfight against a numerically superior opponent. This was going to be a political fight and we needed support.”

Wiegand and Peterson developed what became the Badger Air Community Council, a coalition of civilian business and community leaders who could urge federal lawmakers to champion bringing the F-35 to Wisconsin.

“This was a defining moment,” Wiegand said. “We needed to be disruptive and innovative to change what we thought the course was going to be at that time. And that was going to determine the difference between success and failure. And I’m confident that this team turned the impossible into the possible.”

Even as the 115th Fighter Wing pursued the newest fighter jet, it remained diligent in modernizing its aging fleet of F-16s with lightning pods, GPS guided weapons, updated offensive and defensive systems, and a new radar system.

In 2020, the Air Force announced that the 115th Fighter Wing would receive the F-35A Lightning II fighter jet. Wiegand said that aircraft is expected to provide relevance and stability to the Fighter Wing for 30 more years.

“There are team awards, and there are individual awards, and this [Hall of Fame induction] is no doubt a team award that I’m honored to accept on behalf of many great teams that made these accomplishments possible,” Wiegand said. “And this is perfect timing for this recognition, because on Oct. 5 the last F-16 flies off this base after 30 years of service, and next spring the first F-35 comes on board.”

May acknowledged the “generation’s worth of construction happening over the span of a couple years” at Truax Field as the 115th Fighter Wing prepares for the arrival of the F-35.

“Next spring when the first F-35s arrive, I am sure I will see Col. Wiegand there,”

May said. “And ‘Ace,’ I know you’ll be filled with a well-earned and deep sense of satisfaction. We thank you for your vision, action and impact.”