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Fort Leonard Wood photojournalist selected as DoD Civilian Journalist of the Year

FORT LEONARD WOOD, Mo. – A Fort Leonard Wood Public Affairs photojournalist hardly had time to bask in the glow of winning the top Army journalist of the year award, before the spotlight shined even brighter.

A team of expert judges from industry and academia selected Melissa Buckley as the recipient of the Department of Defense Civilian Journalist of the Year in the 2014 Thomas Jefferson Awards Competition, which is the pinnacle for DoD journalists.

“I don’t know how to put into words how I feel,” Buckley said. “I got an award to do what I love.”

Buckley’s articles have graced the GUIDON post newspaper since 2011. Her articles are a frequent choice of retransmission by the U.S. Army Training and Doctrine Command's Daily News, and her writings are frequently listed on the top 10 list of most-read articles featured on army.mil news releases.

Not bad for a journalist who broke into the career producing live TV news casts fresh out of Southern Illinois University, Carbondale, Illinois.

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“I was shocked when I first heard the news,” Buckley said Tuesday. “Mostly because I was smack dab in the middle of the Best Sapper competition, which takes lots of time and energy.”

Buckley, who had been up since 2 a.m. reporting on the competition, said she was “delirious” after finding out about winning the award that was announced by the Pentagon.

“These outstanding public affairs practitioners, from all the services, represent the finest broadcasters, print journalists and public affairs professionals that the Department of Defense has to offer,” said Brig. Gen. Malcolm Frost, special assistant to the Secretary of the Army for Public Affairs, Washington, in an email.

To my knowledge, this is the first time a Fort Leonard Wood photojournalist has won this award, according to Tiffany Wood, the post's public affairs director. “We are so proud of her accomplishments,” Wood said of the Anna, Illinois, native.

“Her award represents a commitment to tell the stories of Fort Leonard Wood and its Soldiers, civilians and their Family members,” Wood said. “Her achievement at the DoD level highlights the results of her dedication and hard work as judged by experts in the field.”

Buckley’s trek began at the Installation Management Command level where, ironically, a panel picked her as runner up. The command’s top-two journalist automatically earned the right to compete at the U.S. Army level.

However, it was Buckley who won the Army’s Moss-Holland Civilian Journalist of the Year award, which was announced April 7.

“I don’t see myself as an award-winning journalist,” Buckley added. “I’m just a ‘news-nerd’ from Southern Illinois who has a passion for telling others about people and events that I find interesting.”

The Thomas Jefferson Awards Program is a competition for military print and broadcast products. The American Forces Information Service and the Office of the Assistant Secretary of Defense for Public Affairs sponsor the annual contest to stimulate and reward excellence and professionalism in military print and broadcast media.

Prior to the annual Thomas Jefferson Awards contest, each service judges its own entries and selects the best entry in each category to represent that service in the final inter-service competition.

For the Air Force, it’s the Air Force Media Contest, for the Army, it’s the Maj. Gen. Keith L. Ware Journalism Awards Competition, the Alex Haley Journalism Awards for the Coast Guard, and The Chief of Information “CHINFO” Merit Awards for the Navy.

Encl: Photo

Photo Credit:

Buckley_1: Photo by Mike Curtis, FLW Visual Information Center

About Fort Leonard Wood

Fort Leonard Wood is a thriving and prosperous installation that has evolved from a small basic training post 70 years ago to a premier Army Center of Excellence that trains about 80,000 military and civilians each year.

Home to the Maneuver Support Center of Excellence, Fort Leonard Wood now trains and educates service members and develops doctrine and capabilities for the Training and Doctrine Command's U.S. Army Chemical, Biological, Radiological, and Nuclear School, U.S. Army Engineer School, and U.S. Army Military Police School, three gender integrated Initial Military Training brigades, and the Army's largest Noncommissioned Officers Academy.

Over the past several years, Fort Leonard Wood has received numerous additional responsibilities to include supporting the 4th Maneuver Enhancement Brigade, a large Forces Command unit that is responsible for all deployable capabilities at Fort Leonard Wood. A colonel-commanded Marine Corps Detachment and an Air Force Detachment, which are both the largest on any Army installation, are located on Fort Leonard Wood; a large Navy Seabee Detachment and elements of the Coast Guard train here as well.
