

McCann...from Page 1A

living up to the much-revered Ranger Creed every day of their careers.

McCann, like many veterans, is weary of bestowing the title of hero upon himself, preferring instead to pay tribute to the countless patriots with whom he served.

His fellow Rangers on the Hall of Fame Selection Committee, however, harbored no such reservations about his hero status, which is how he and 15 others from around the country came to be at Fort Benning for induction as members of the 2019 Ranger Hall of Fame in July.

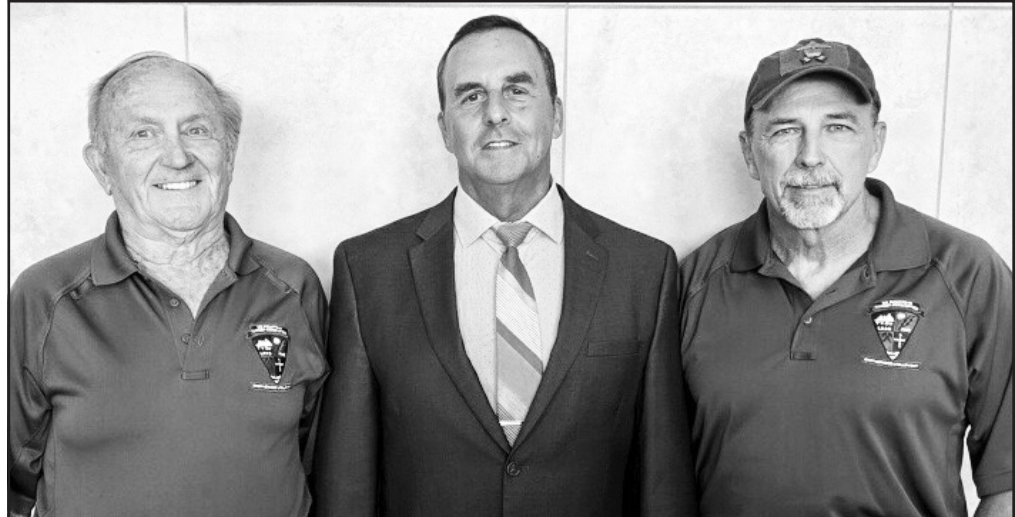
Joining McCann for the induction ceremony at Fort Benning were his family and several friends, including Bob Bischoff of Towns County and Tom Wilburn of Union County, both fellow Ranger Hall of Famers inducted in previous years.

In his remarks at the July 10 ceremony, McCann paid homage to the selfless service of the soldiers he'd served alongside over the years, and he took special care to highlight the crucial role his wife had played in maintaining the McCann household while he was away on Army business.

"My three sons Sean, Kyle and Ryan all served in



McCann with his family at the Ranger Hall of Fame induction in Fort Benning on July 10.



Local Ranger Hall of Famers Bob Bischoff, Art McCann and Tom Wilburn in Fort Benning.

the military honorably, and my daughter Lindsey, who graduated from Berry College, is pursuing her new career," McCann said. "They all make me proud.

"Growing up, they endured long deployments and days when dad wasn't there. The person who was there was my wife Vickie of 35 years. She raised a family and managed a career. She always supported everything I did and wanted to do. She was always there when I left and when I came home."

Wrapping up his ceremony comments, McCann thanked the Union County community at large for embracing him and giving him "another opportunity to make a difference in the lives of young Americans in the school where I work."

"In closing, I will pass on my beliefs," McCann said that day. "Always believe in God, honor your family and true friends, and be honest and loyal to those that are loyal to you. Rangers lead the way. Thank you."

American Rangers are an elite fighting force within the U.S. Army. They emphasize leadership on and off the battlefield and year-round training. As such, Rangers are always ready to go and are constantly conducting missions in support of the United States' military efforts abroad.

McCann served in a variety of Ranger and Infantry troop-leading positions throughout his 28-year career, which spanned times of peace and war alike between 1982 and his retirement in 2010.

In 1989, as a platoon sergeant in the 1st Ranger Battalion, McCann took part in a combat parachute mission in support of Operation Just Cause in Panama, which culminated in the swift ousting of dictator Manuel Noriega some 30 years ago.

Three years later, in 1992, he received the Soldier's Medal for Heroism after risking his life to save the only survivor of the fatal MH-60G Pave Hawk helicopter crash on Great Salt Lake, which occurred during a training mission and resulted in the deaths of 12 of 13 service members.

While serving at Camp Merrill as a mountaineering instructor in the mid-1990s, McCann competed and placed well in the back-breaking Best Ranger Competition three years in a row, and in 1996, he was part of a military team that placed 11th in the grueling international Eco-Challenge in British Columbia, Canada.

In 2003, McCann volunteered to serve in Iraq in the early stages of the Global War on Terrorism, and he would go on to deploy in Afghanistan as well, where he earned a Purple Heart for injuries sustained in combat.

It was during his deployments in the War on Terror that he worked his way up to the highest enlisted rank in the Army, command sergeant major.

As command sergeant major, he was critical as an instructor of and advocate for the many thousands of enlisted

soldiers under his various commands, including those "Swift and Lethal" of the 189th Infantry Brigade and the "Sky Soldiers" of the 173rd Airborne Brigade.

All told, McCann played a vital role in positively influencing scores of young men and women over his extensive Army career, as recognized by his Hall of Fame induction most recently, and by his receipt of the prestigious Legion of Merit after retiring in 2010.

And for the last eight years, McCann has carried his military leadership forward with the youth of Union County, having served as a high school wrestling coach, a mentor to and advocate for students in a wide range of school system roles, and an administrator with disciplinary oversight.

The initial transition to civilian life was jarring for McCann, however, as he went from "going at 110 miles an hour to like 25." This resulted in a relatively short period of full retirement for the lifelong Ranger, who had moved to the county with his family in the summer of 2009.

For about the first six months of retirement, McCann concentrated on wrapping up work on the family's newly built home and getting back into a regular exercise routine.

But the relative safety and slower pace of Blairsville compared to his former life of combat and constant training left McCann in search of something more to do with his newfound time, so he started applying for jobs around town.

His first new job in retirement was as a census taker in 2010, and he enjoyed getting to meet people and learning more of the county in that position, though he still desired more permanent employment when that job came to an end.

He was approached with the opportunity to return to his former life in a way as a private security contractor in Afghanistan, but McCann decided it would probably be best to stick closer to home since he'd retired from the military.

Fortunately, McCann struck up a friendship with

fellow Ranger Williams, whom he'd gotten to know as his daughter's teacher at Union County Middle.

Williams encouraged him to join the local Ranger association at the time, and a little later, to apply for a substitute teaching position at the schools in 2011.

McCann resolved to give it a shot. He visited the Towns & Union Alternative Education Program to see about a possible sub position, and there, he met current School Superintendent John Hill, who was serving as AEP administrator back then.

Right away, the two men forged a professional friendship that ultimately led to McCann's present-day position as an administrative assistant at the high school, and McCann credits both Hill and the military with much of the success he's experienced in the schools.

"I'm doing the same thing as a sergeant major," McCann said. "I'm overlooking a unit – a school – and I'm just taking care of anything and everything that happens. And I'm used to that, so I've found my place in semi-retirement in the world up here. I like it. It's good."

Added McCann, "Whatever you do, you've got to make a difference. That's what I believed in the military, and when I retired, I said, 'I'm going to try to make a difference and help out the community that I'm moving to.' Honestly, that's what I think I'm doing."

From the academic standouts to the students requiring more disciplinary guidance, McCann loves working with all the kids at the school and is thankful for the position.

And as a veteran with so much military experience, McCann has been instrumental in offering real-world guidance to students curious about military life and joining up to serve their country.

McCann has also been an active member of Union County's large community of veterans, and he organizes the school system's districtwide Veterans Day Program that is led by high school students each November.