



KATHLEEN VINEHOUT **STATE SENATOR**

Troops have one more opportunity to provide service **By** **Senator Kathleen Vinehout**

On Christmas Eve, from an undisclosed location in Iraq, a First Lieutenant in Wisconsin's National Guard shared with me his Christmas wish. He wrote; "I will be returning home and would like nothing more than some time to sit in the woods with some peace and quiet."

Because of their service to our country, members of the 32nd "Red Arrow" Infantry Brigade Combat Team missed many of the things we take for granted, including the traditional gun deer hunt in November.

The First Lieutenant was part of the largest operational deployment of Wisconsin National Guard troops since World War II. The 32nd Brigade estimated they may have been the best trained ever to report to a mobilization training site – Fort Bliss, Texas. Which is where they were headed last time I and hundreds of our neighbors and friends said goodbye.

In Iraq our troops had the task of building up Iraq's military forces, moving prisoners, training soldiers and closing detention facilities. They provided security, formed quick reaction forces and turned over US controlled property to the Iraq military.

They worked in hot, sandy, difficult and dangerous conditions while thinking about our beautiful cool and calm Wisconsin's woods. And many who shared the First Lieutenant's Christmas wish wrote and asked me to help organize a deer hunt.

Our troops are mostly back on US soil. At Fort McCoy, I caught up with one of the men who contacted me about the deer hunt. He was moving through the week-long demobilization process and still thinking about deer hunting.

I shared with him my story about making his fellow soldiers' Christmas wish come true.

Representative Danou and I introduced a bill to create a one-time weekend deer hunt in February to allow the troops to hunt. But we quickly ran into problems. People who planned to be in the woods that weekend didn't like the idea of anyone gun hunting. And hunters in some parts of the state were worried the deer numbers were already too low.

But, in a story of heroes, another hero emerged - Senator Jim Holperin of Eagle River. Senator Holperin chairs the Senate Natural Resources Committee to which our bill was assigned. An experienced diplomat, he shuttled between competing groups and spent days knocking out a compromise. He was so pleased when an agreement was reached he interrupted a Committee hearing I was chairing to tell me the details.

Under the agreement, National Guard soldiers returning from Iraq will be paired with a farmer who has deer damage on his or her land. The Department of Natural Resources will link landowners who have crop damage with soldiers who want to harvest nuisance deer. The soldier will be issued deer tags and will be able to hunt on the farmer's property any time that is convenient to both parties.

This is a win-win situation that successfully navigates the practical problems we faced when we proposed a state-wide hunt.

Even the Secretary of Natural Resources, Matt Frank was excited by the plan, "We are happy...to give our vets a chance to catch up on the deer hunting they missed while they were serving our country overseas."

When I reached the soldier at Fort McCoy to tell him the news, he was very surprised. "I never thought you would be able to get this far," he told me.

In a time of bad news and painfully slow bureaucracy, it is a thrill to be able to grant a simple Christmas wish to those men and women in uniform who have given so much on our behalf.

A big 'thank you' to everyone who made a Christmas wish come true. And an even bigger "WELCOME HOME" to our brother and sister soldiers.