

September 15 Set as Military Appreciation Day

Written by Mike Flynn
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Appalachian State University athletics will partner with the Appalachian Army ROTC, Army National Guard and Wounded Warrior Project (WWP) to host Military Appreciation Day, sponsored by Appalachian Regional

Healthcare System, on Sept. 15 in conjunction with the Mountaineers' Southern Conference football opener versus The Citadel at Kidd Brewer Stadium. Appalachian will hold various events throughout the day in honor and support of active members and veterans of the U.S. military, particularly those wounded while defending our nation's freedom, including a patriotic salute by the Marching Mountaineers, a musket presentation and the presentation of the game ball by a local Wounded Warrior. Highlighting the military recognition, Capt. Jonathan Pruden, Appalachian State class of 2001 and Wounded Warrior, will be honored prior to the game. Pruden attended Appalachian on a four-year Army ROTC scholarship, was commissioned upon his graduation in May 2001 and assigned as a battalion medical officer with the 3-7 Infantry of the Third Infantry Division. In January 2003, the 25-year-old was deployed to Iraq and while traveling on a main road in eastern Baghdad when, as Pruden recalled, "the whole world exploded." Pruden was one of Operation Iraqi Freedom's first victims of an improvised explosive device (IED).

As an injured soldier, the system was overwhelming and Pruden struggled with the complexity of the medical and benefits process. He was stymied by the number of forms he had to fill out and phone calls he had to make and thought there had to be a way for other wounded soldiers to not experience the same frustrations that he did. After leaving the Walter Reed Army Medical Center in Washington, D.C., Pruden learned about WWP.

The mission of WWP is to honor and empower Wounded Warriors. WWP is a non-profit organization with the vision to foster the most successful, well-adjusted generation of wounded service members in our nation's history. More than 48,000 service members have been physically wounded during the current military conflicts in Iraq and Afghanistan and hundreds of thousands more are estimated to be recovering from invisible wounds of war, including post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), major depression and traumatic brain injury (TBI). "Wounded Warriors are models of service and dedication, and opportunities to be publicly recognized for their sacrifices at events like this can be a once-in-a-lifetime experience for them," said Steve Nardizzi, executive director, Wounded Warrior Project. "Our hope is that our WWP Alumni will also inspire student-athletes, teams and fans around the country as they share their stories of recovery and resiliency."

"It is an honor and a privilege to host the Appalachian Army ROTC, Army National Guard and Wounded Warrior Project in recognition of our military heroes on Sept. 15," Appalachian State director of athletics Charlie Cobb said. "The motto of the Wounded Warrior Project is 'the greatest casualty is being forgotten' and we are proud to host Military Appreciation Day in hopes of bringing awareness to this outstanding organization and helping ensure that our greatest heroes, which includes many members of the Appalachian family, are never forgotten."

In recognition of Military Appreciation Day, active military members and veterans can purchase up to six tickets to the Sept. 15 Appalachian-Citadel contest for just \$17 with a military ID. Tickets can be purchased beginning at 9 a.m. on August 7 (the first day that single-game tickets

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are available to the general public). Discounted tickets can be purchased at the Appalachian athletics ticket office (located in the Holmes Center) by phone at (828) 262-2079 or on gameday at the Kidd Brewer Stadium ticket plaza (located on the northeast side of the stadium at the corner of Stadium Drive and Jack Branch Drive).

Photo Courtesy: ASU Military Appreciation Day, ASU Athletics