

General Peter Schoomaker

By R. L. WOLVERTON, *Alumnews* Writer

"University of Wyoming alumni should be proud of the environment and the institution that we have there. I run into Wyoming graduates constantly who are doing well and are responsible citizens. I certainly feel the education, life experience and leadership and mentoring I had there were very valuable. I'm proud of my association with UW," says Distinguished Alumnus General Peter Schoomaker.

Schoomaker was born in Detroit, Michigan and, as a member of an army family, traveled throughout the United States as he grew up. He transferred to UW from Michigan State University, and earned a BS in Health and Physical Education from UW's College of Education in 1969.

"My years at Wyoming were an important transition period in my life," Schoomaker said, recalling the many lifetime friends he made during his time at the University. "I had so many experiences there that ended up being so important to me later. Because I played football, I have a strong memory of that period and the strong personalities that were involved. UW has become a very large part of my life. Although I didn't plan it, participation in Army ROTC was the genesis of my Army career. I feel so strongly about Wyoming that I have kept it as my home of record," he said.

As a child, Schoomaker's family moved constantly. "I never had a home. As a result of the friendships and experiences I had at UW, I look back at Wyoming as providing some semblance of roots. The University of Wyoming became home for me," he adds.

Schoomaker is probably best known to Wyomingites as a member of a highly successful Wyoming Cowboys football team. He lettered in 1966, '67 and '68, and was a member of the 1966 Sun Bowl team and the 1969 Sugar Bowl team. Schoomaker played under Head Coach Lloyd Eaton ("A very straight and strict disciplinarian," Schoomaker recalls) and defense coordinator Fritz Shurmer, who went on to engineer the world championship defense for the Green Bay Packers.

Often referred to as the best defensive tackle in the history of UW football, Schoomaker was inducted into the University of Wyoming Cowboy Athletics Hall of Fame in September of 1997.

Schoomaker has been recognized as an exemplary UW student and citizen of Wyoming outside the athletics arena. He was chosen as the College of Education's Outstanding Senior in Health, Physical Education and Recreation in 1969 and was inducted into the Omicron Delta Kappa Men's Leadership Honor Society in the same year. In 1997 Schoomaker was selected as Grand Marshall of the Cheyenne Frontier Days celebration and has recently been nominated as Wyoming Citizen of the Century in the military division. The nomination as Citizen of the Century was made by peers within the military community, a testament to the respect Schoomaker has earned from his contemporaries.

"I'm proud of my association with the University of Wyoming," Schoomaker says, "it has been instrumental in all that I've done since."

In addition to a full course load and intercollegiate football, Schoomaker participated in Army ROTC at Wyoming. While an ROTC cadet, he was selected as Brigade Commander for the Corps of Cadets and was recognized as a Distinguished Military Graduate.

Following graduation, Schoomaker was commissioned a second lieutenant in the U. S. Army's Armor Branch. During his first year of active duty, he was selected as the Outstanding ROTC Graduate in Armor by the U.S. Armor Association.

Throughout his Army career, Schoomaker has served



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duty assignments around the world and has held various leadership positions, including infantry reconnaissance platoon leader, rifle company commander, armored cavalry troop commander and squadron leader.

In 1977 Schoomaker was assigned to Special Operations, where he served with the top-secret Delta Force and the famous Green Berets. Schoomaker's Special Operations responsibilities included serving as detachment, company, battalion and group level commander.

Schoomaker participated in several well-known campaigns as a Special Operations officer, including Desert One (during the Iran hostage crisis), Operation Urgent Fury in Grenada, Operation Just Cause in Panama, Operations Desert Shield and Desert Storm in the Persian Gulf and Operation Uphold Democracy in Haiti.

In 1992, Schoomaker was promoted to Brigadier General. Alan Simpson, Wyoming Senator at the time, spoke to the U. S. Senate about Schoomaker, saying, "He is a genuine, real American hero, and, indeed, has a military record beyond comparison. We are very proud of Pete Schoomaker in Wyoming. Pete is the genuine article, a real American hero. As I often like to say, 'many people can talk the talk, but very few can walk the walk.' Pete is one of those very few who can 'walk the walk.'" Because of his outstanding military record and performance, Schoomaker has been, "Consistently promoted, ahead of his peers," according to Joe Hiller, who nominated him for Distinguished Alumnus.

Following Congressional approval in 1997, Schoomaker received his fourth star and was named Commander in Chief of the United States Special Operations Command, stationed at McDill Air Force Base in Florida. In that position, Schoomaker is responsible for all United States special forces military operations. Congressional action placed all military special forces units, including the Navy SEALs, the Air Force Special Tactics Squadrons, the Army Rangers and Army Special Forces (Green Berets) under a united command structure in order to better coordinate special operations.

Special Operations forces conduct direct action, for-

eign internal defense, special reconnaissance, counterdrug and other types of operations when conventional military intervention is not appropriate or sufficient for the mission.

As commander of the Special Operations Command, Schoomaker is one of nine four-star general officers filling commander-in-chief positions in the United States Military. He reports directly to the Secretary of Defense. "Our group has war-fighting responsibilities as do other branches of the service, but we also receive service-like assignments, using an unusual combination of military assets," Schoomaker says.

Schoomaker's distinguished military service has earned him honors and recognition through several decorations, including the Defense Superior Service Medal with three oak leaf clusters; Legion of Merit with two oak leaf clusters; Bronze Star Medal with one oak leaf cluster; Defense Meritorious Service Medal with one oak leaf cluster; Meritorious Service Medal; Joint Service Commendation Medal; Joint Service Achievement Medal; Combat Infantryman Badge; Master Parachutist Badge; Military Free Fall Badge; Ranger Tab and Special Forces Tab.

Education didn't stop with UW for General Schoomaker. He has graduated from the Marine Amphibious Warfare School, the U. S. Army Command and General Staff College, the National War College, the JFK School of Government, Harvard University in Senior National and International Security Affairs, and has received an MA in management from Central Michigan University.

When an individual builds a successful military career, especially in special forces, as Pete Schoomaker has, it is often difficult to find time to provide additional service to community organizations. Some would even say that serving the country is enough community involvement. But even with an enormous workload ("We're very active, I spend a lot of time away," he says), Schoomaker gives something back to the community.

He has lectured ROTC cadets at UW, and says he is looking forward to doing so again when he returns in October. He is an active participant in veteran's organizations, is a Life Member of the UW Alumni Association and supporter of the UW Foundation, is a Life Member of the Wyoming Special Forces Association, headquartered in Cheyenne, and the National War College Alumni Association.

As this article was being prepared, Schoomaker had just returned from a special assignment as assistant scout master for a Boy Scout summer camp. "That was quite a challenge," Schoomaker said.

When asked to reflect on his greatest career achievement outside UW, Schoomaker immediately replied, "I've raised a nice family." He is married to the former Cindy Petroski and has two daughters, Wendy and Lara and one son, Andrew. "I've had a very successful military career, too," he adds.

Schoomaker says he is such a strong Wyoming booster that Lara insists her parents chose her name because it is made up of the first four letters in Laramie. "She thinks it's deliberate," Schoomaker chuckled.

"I'm proud of my association with the University of Wyoming. It has been instrumental in all I have accomplished. The University provided me with a foundation—both educational and in life experiences—that has proven very valuable. Wyoming is a special place. I've lived all over the world. Wyoming still has a sense of independence and freedom that made the country great" Schoomaker concluded.