



OADII Executive Director and retired U.S. Air Force Gen. Robin Rand and Deputy Executive Director and retired U.S. Air Force Col. Drew Allen stand outside the OU Armory.

PAIGE OWENS

A Strategic Alliance

Distinguished combat veterans bring decades of hard-won defense experience to OADII.

BY TIM WILLERT

AT THE CONTROLS of OU's Oklahoma Aerospace and Defense Initiative Institute are two highly decorated, battle-tested fighter pilots with more than 65 years of combined military experience.

Robin Rand, a retired U.S. Air Force 4-star general, is the institute's executive director, and at his right hand is OADII deputy executive director and retired Air Force Col. Drew Allen.

Rand, 68, served as commander of the Air Force Global Strike Command, which provides combat-ready forces to conduct strategic nuclear deterrence and global strike operations in support of combat commandants.

As commander, he was responsible for the country's three ICBM missile wings and five bomber wings. The Iraq War veteran has logged more than 5,100 flying hours—480 in combat.

Rand, a U.S. Air Force Academy graduate, had six overseas assignments and his experiences included serving as commandant of the USAF Weapons School; commander of the 8th Fighter Wing, 56th Fighter Wing

and 332nd Air Expeditionary Wing; principal director for Middle East policy for the U.S. Secretary of Defense; director of the Legislative Liaison Office; commander of the 12th Air Force/Air Forces Southern Command; and commander of Air Education and Training Command.

"Fifty-plus years of involvement with our national defense is what prepared me for OADII," Rand says. "I'm grateful that I can still participate in ensuring that our nation's umbrella of security remains strong."

Allen, 49, retired as the only pilot qualified to fly every modern Air Force fighter aircraft. He accumulated more than 3,300 flight hours in 55 different aircraft types.

"We relate very well and speak a common language with similar experiences," Allen says of his collaboration with Rand. "I complement his leadership style well. He is the big-picture, strategic, relational leader and I implement his vision and provide subject matter expertise to enable our journey to the end-state goals."

OADII focuses on spectrum dominance, modernization and sustainment resilience, cyberspace and information technology, and international security policy.

"Our hope is that we will continue to support our nation's and partner nations' warfighters in a meaningful way, so that the security of our families remains intact," says Rand.

Allen says the Air Force provided him with "countless opportunities to grow, learn and contribute to our national defense, to be part of something much greater than myself, and to work with and lead amazing people toward a common goal.

"I was privileged to join a unique, exceptional and exclusive community as a fighter pilot and developmental test pilot," he says. "Very few officers in the military have the opportunity to develop knowledge, skills and expertise across the entire spectrum of the mission."

Rand was a policy adviser to OU Vice President for Research and Partnerships Tomás Díaz de la Rubia before joining OADII in 2023. Rand says he "strongly recommended and endorsed" Allen for the role of deputy executive director.

Rand cited Allen's experience in the aerospace defense arena, along with his strong leadership, connection to Oklahoma and OU, and expertise. "I trust him implicitly," he says.

Allen, an Owasso, Okla., native and proud citizen of the Chickasaw Nation, recalls with chagrin that he couldn't wait to leave Oklahoma when he enrolled in the U.S. Air Force Academy at age 18.

Military service changed his perspective.

"I very quickly learned how fortunate I was to grow up here and how special Oklahomans are," he says. "I traveled the world multiple times over, experienced some wonderful and horrible places, and met many amazing people along the way.

"But simply put, Oklahomans are the most genuine and authentic people, and I felt a strong pull to come back home." **S**

Tim Willert is a freelance writer and OU adjunct instructor who lives in Norman.