

**You Have to Be Taught Before It's Too Late**     *by Mary Beaudoin*

*Before you are six, or seven, or eight...* the opening lyrics from the perennial musical *South Pacific* could have applied to Camp Ripley's Open House Day when the facility invites the public, including families, to visit the Minnesota National Guard facility. Excited young children ran about for an afternoon of adventure exploring massively-lethal weaponry. They climbed all over tanks equipped with impressive canons and played at operating real—though not fireable at the time—weapons such as a grenade launcher and a long-range Ma Deuce machine gun. (This type of machine gun was described as follows by one war fighting enthusiast: "Witnessing the down-range effects of the .50-caliber bullet is an eye-opening experience," writes Gordon Rottman, author of *Browning .50-Caliber Machine Guns*. "There are few who can say they were wounded by a .50-cal. Those hit seldom say much more." [tinyurl.com/y9od52ek](http://tinyurl.com/y9od52ek))

Assisting children with sighting and handling the weaponry were soldiers in regulation camouflage, instructing them as tenderly as their pre-school and elementary teachers might with encouraging words: "Isn't that cool?" Of course, it highly unlikely that the children were aware that in wars on the receiving end of the weapons could be civilians—including children like themselves—inevitable, if unintended, casualties.