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Tennessee Guardsman honored as top Air Guard First Sergeant

NASHVILLE – A former Springfield, Tenn., resident was selected as the 2009 First Sergeant of the Year for the Air National Guard and recognized during an awards ceremony for Outstanding Airmen of the Year held last month at Andrews Air Force Base, Maryland.

“It’s an honor and humbling at the same time,” said Master Sgt. Lorene Kitzmiller, who won the award. She is a First Sergeant with the 118th Aeromedical Evacuation Squadron in Nashville, currently living in Stafford, Va., and commuting to Tennessee on drill weekends.

“When I graduated from the First Sergeant’s Academy I made a commitment,” she explained, “I would be on duty 24/7, be the person to stick up for the Airmen, lift them up, give them opportunities, keep them informed and help them succeed while serving my commander and unit.”

Each year the states and territories select and submit their top performers from the Air Guard’s 88 flying units and 579 mission support units. Five other Airmen were selected as outstanding Airmen in other categories.

“They are the best of the best,” said Lt. Gen. Harry M. Wyatt III, director of the Air National Guard, during the ceremony. “All nominees can be extremely proud of being selected to represent their states.”

“They are the cream-of-the-crop of the Air Guard’s 93,000-plus enlisted Airmen,” added Chief Master Sgt. Christopher Muncy, Command Chief of the Air National Guard.

Kitzmiller attended Dickson County High School in Tennessee and left for Navy basic training 10 days after graduation. Upon discharge four years later, she joined the Army Reserve, served in several units before transferring to the Tennessee Army National Guard, and then finally to the state’s Air National Guard as a Medical Administrative Specialist. In December 2005, she was appointed to the First Sergeant position.

(more)

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The highly decorated Master Sergeant is currently a senior at Austin Peay State University, working towards her Bachelor's degree, which she should receive in about eight months.

Kitzmilller has participated in multiple overseas deployments including Operation Northern Watch (Macedonia), Operation Southern Watch (Saudi Arabia), Operation Iraqi Freedom (Kuwait, Baghdad, and twice in Balad), and Operation Enduring Freedom (Andrews Air Force Base).

She was actively involved in Operation Stand Down for three years, and was a volunteer with the Tennessee Drug Task Force Team and YMCA, as a drill instructor, during summer camps for troubled youth.

“My commander mentioned that he wanted to submit a package for me for the competition, but he didn't ask for anything specific at the time so I didn't think much of it,” Kitzmilller said.

“A few drills later, he started asking for biographical information and what I had done for my unit. I had a difficult time thinking of things. Everything seemed like tasks that any First Sergeant would do. Nothing seemed to stand out to me.”

She has volunteered with military kids support programs and helped homeless veterans find shelter and employment. “My father was in Vietnam so veterans hold a special place for me. I wouldn't feel fulfilled if I wasn't doing something to help others,” she said.

“I wanted to be a First Sergeant when I first joined the military. It's what my father did in the Army at Fort Campbell. It's that little secret you keep when you first join, like some people aspire to be a general, some want to be pilots. I always wanted to be this, but never imagined I would get the opportunity,” she said.

CUTLINE:

The Air National Guard's six Outstanding Airmen of the Year at Fort McNair during a June 9 reception dinner with Air Force Gen. Craig R. McKinley, Chief of National Guard Bureau. Master Sgt. Lorene D. Kitzmilller is fourth from the left. (Photo by Air Force Master Sgt. Mike R. Smith, National Guard Bureau)

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