

THE CARGO COURIER

123rd Airlift Wing, Kentucky Air National Guard, Louisville, Ky.

Vol. XXX, No. 3 • March 14, 2015

Willing, Yeats, Taylor to be honored as Airmen of the Year

Banquet being held tonight at Fair Grounds

By Senior Airman Joshua Horton
123rd Airlift Wing Public Affairs

Senior Airman Robert W. Willging, Tech Sgt. Don A. Yeats and Master Sgt. Zakiya A. Taylor will be honored at a banquet tonight as the Kentucky Air National Guard's Outstanding Airmen of the Year for 2014.

The three Airmen, chosen from a pool of 18 nominees, were selected because of their leadership and performance in their primary duties, dedication to self-improvement, and community involvement, according to Chief Master Sgt. Ray Dawson of the Kentucky Air National Guard Chiefs' Council, which selects the winners.

Willging, winner of the Airman category, is a combat control specialist in the 123rd Special Tactics Squadron. In the past year, he has displayed judgment beyond his pay grade in flawlessly controlling more than 30 surgically precise air strikes to kill enemies while protecting civilians, according to his supervisor, Master Sgt. Russ Lemay. Willging voluntarily deployed for 138 days to Afghanistan as the sole Airman directing air power for an Army Special Forces team, killing 110 terrorists and destroying 16 enemy fighting positions and vehicles.

"I could not think of a more deserving award for Senior Airman Willging than Airman of the Year," Lemay said. "Rob's accomplishments in 2014 were truly remarkable. In the Special Tactics community, our operators are already working alongside a highly motivated and carefully selected force. To stand out amongst such elite company is a testament to Rob's talent, dedication and hard work."

Yeats, winner of the Non-Commissioned Officer category, is a radio transmission systems specialist for the 123rd Special Tactics Squadron. He led the development of a maritime communication system and repurposed communications suite that allows mission commanders to track and direct surface forces from airborne platforms. Yeats accomplished this while utilizing existing hardware and software solutions, saving more than \$500,000 in the process, according to his supervisor, Master Sgt. Frank Tallman.

Read more online at
www.123aw.ang.af.mil/news/story.asp?id=123441831



WILLGING



YEATS



TAYLOR

Bullard promoted to brigadier general

Steven P. Bullard, chief of staff for Headquarters, Kentucky Air National Guard, was promoted to the rank of brigadier general during a ceremony at the Kentucky Air National Guard Base Feb. 7. See more online at www.123aw.ang.af.mil/news/story.asp?id=123438942

Airmen deploy to Persian Gulf

The first 37 of more than 110 Kentucky Air National Guardsmen departed here Feb. 21 for deployment to an undisclosed air base in the Persian Gulf region. The Airmen left aboard a Kentucky Air Guard C-130 Hercules for a four-month mission supporting coalition military operations in the United States Central Command Area of Responsibility. See more online at www.123aw.ang.af.mil/news/story.asp?id=123439806

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Special Tactics troop receives Bronze Star Medal

By Staff Sgt. Vicky Spesard
123rd Airlift Wing Public Affairs

A combat controller from the Kentucky Air National Guard's 123rd Special Tactics Squadron was awarded the Bronze Star Medal here Feb. 7 for meritorious service while deployed to Afghanistan, where he engaged enemy forces and deterred their advances.

Staff Sgt. Nicholas P. Jewell served as a Joint Terminal Attack Controller assigned to an Army Special Forces team from Aug. 12, 2014, to Nov. 10, 2014, in support of Operation Enduring Freedom. Jewell was tasked to provide tactical advice and assistance to Afghan Army Commando teams performing combat operations in northeastern Afghanistan when he and his team came under small-arms fire.

As rounds impacted within feet of his position, Jewell ran to cover behind a ridge line and immediately returned fire while simultaneously relaying enemy locations to aircraft overhead, according to the award citation. He then controlled an immediate air-to-ground engagement with high explosives from an AH-64 attack helicopter, resulting in multiple enemies killed in action.

"So obviously he found himself in a bad spot," said Col. Matthew Davidson, commander of the 24th Special Operations Wing, who officiated the award ceremony and presented the medal to Jewell. "He went out and saved his teammates and saved the mission. It's folks like him that we want to emulate."

Jewell also was recognized for his actions during a clearing operation when his element came under direct small-arms fire. He immediately coordinated efforts between ground signals intelligence forces and overhead aircraft to locate and engage the enemy fighting location with devastating effects.

"What we have asked Nick to do, and his teammates to do -- in fact what we ask a lot of Americans out there to do for us sometimes -- they have extraordinary responses to that," Davidson said. "Like (Jewell) did on numerous occasions."

The Bronze Star Medal was authorized by executive order on Feb. 4, 1944, and is awarded to service members who have distinguished themselves by heroic or meritorious achievement or service in connection with military operations against an armed enemy.



Staff Sgt. Vicky Spesard/KyANG

Col. Matthew Davidson (left), commander of the 24th Special Operations Wing, presents Staff Sgt. Nicholas P. Jewell, a combat controller in the 123rd Special Tactics Squadron, with the Bronze Star Medal during a ceremony here Feb. 7.

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The editorial content is edited, prepared and provided by the Public Affairs Office of the 123rd Airlift Wing, Kentucky Air National Guard. All photographs are Air National Guard photographs unless otherwise indicated.

We welcome your feedback. Please contact the Public Affairs Office directly if you have suggestions for articles or photography. Our office is located in Room 1160 of the Wing Headquarters Building, 1101 Grade Lane, Louisville, KY 40213.

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