

THE CARGO COURIER

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

Vol. XXXII, No. 2 • Feb. 4, 2017

STS troop awarded Air Force Cross

By Lt. Col. Dale Greer
123rd Airlift Wing Public Affairs

A retired Airman from the Kentucky Air National Guard will receive the Air Force's highest honor for his extraordinary heroism during combat operations in Afghanistan, the Air Force announced Jan. 19.

Master Sgt. Keary Miller, a former pararescueman in the Kentucky Air Guard's 123rd Special Tactics Squadron, had initially been awarded the Silver Star for actions during a grueling 17-hour siege on a remote Afghan mountain called Takur Ghar in 2002.

That decoration was officially upgraded to the Air Force Cross on Jan. 17 as part of a Defense Department-directed review of Air Force combat medals.

"Sergeant Miller's heroic and selfless actions during the Battle of Takur Ghar represent the very finest qualities of the Airmen of the Kentucky Air National Guard," said U.S. Army Maj. Gen. Stephen R. Hogan, adjutant general of the Commonwealth of Kentucky.

"He repeatedly risked his own life under enemy fire to render life-saving assistance to multiple wounded U.S. service members while distributing ammunition to Army Rangers defending their position. It is entirely appropriate that Sergeant Miller is now being recognized with the Air Force's highest combat decoration."

The Battle of Takur Ghar was part of a larger effort named Operation Anaconda, which was intended to defeat Taliban forces hiding in Paktia province. On the third day of the operation — March 4, 2002 — a U.S. Army MH-47E Chinook helicopter was fired upon as it attempted to land on the mountain.

"Taking heavy fire, the helicopter lurched and attempted to take off to extricate itself from the field of fire," according to an official account published by the National Guard Bureau.

"When the Chinook lurched, one of the Navy SEALs on board, Petty Officer First Class Neil C. Roberts, fell from the rear ramp. Too damaged to return for Petty Officer Roberts, the Chinook landed further down the mountain.

"A second MH-47E attempted to land and rescue Roberts, but it too was fired upon and forced to leave the immediate area. The third MH-47E to attempt a landing on what became known as Roberts' Ridge was hit with automatic weapons fire and rocket-propelled grenades while still 20 feet in the air."

That helicopter, carrying Miller and an Army Ranger team, hit the ground hard, according to the official account.

"Within seconds, one helicopter crewman, the right door gunner, was

killed, as were three Army Rangers," the account said.

The remainder of the assault team formed a hasty defense despite five critical casualties, with Miller dragging the helicopter pilot to safety and crossing open danger areas under heavy fire to assess and care for wounded servicemen.

As the 17-hour battle drew on, Miller removed ammunition from the deceased and, in multiple acts of extraordinary courage, proceeded through rocket-propelled grenade, mortar and small-arms fire to re-distribute the ammunition to defense forces.

Shortly thereafter, another attack erupted, killing one pararescueman and compromising the casualty collection point. Miller braved the barrage of fire in order to move the wounded to better cover and concealment, according to his award citation.

Read more at www.123aw.ang.af.mil



PARARESCUEMAN AWARDED AIR FORCE CROSS FOR VALOR DURING BATTLE OF ROBERTS RIDGE

Senior Airman Ryan Conroy/U.S. Air Force

Fifteen years after a 17-hour battle on an Afghan mountaintop, Master Sgt. (Ret.) Keary Miller's extraordinary heroism is being recognized with an Air Force Cross.

Pfeifer concludes 28 years in service

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

Col. Kathryn C. Pfeifer retired with more than 28 years of honorable service to the United States Air Force and Kentucky Air National Guard during a ceremony held here Jan. 7.

Presiding over the ceremony was retired Maj. Gen. Mark Kraus, former Air National Guard assistant to the commander of United States Air Forces Central Command, Kentucky's former assistant adjutant general for Air, and also Pfeifer's mentor and friend.

"You don't just wake up one morning to high rank and great responsibility," said the general, who is also a former commander of the 123rd Airlift Wing.

"You earn it through hard work and the course of a career. Kathy has proven time and again at every level, with every turn, to have the maturity, leadership, competence and strategic vision — the drive to work, lead and finish as the accomplished officer she is today.

"In my 43 years of service, I can think of no finer officer to come through the ranks, to serve with greater honor and distinction," he continued.

"I am proud of you, honored to have served with you and I thank you, on behalf of this great organization. We wish you the very best as this chapter of your life closes and another one opens."

Pfeifer made history in the Kentucky Air National Guard by becoming the first female line officer to attain the rank of colonel. She most recently served as Mission Support Group commander, directing

the operations of more than 450 Airmen who provide base fire protection, security and force protection, civil engineering, disaster preparedness, communications and information technology services to the wing.

Prior to that, Pfeifer served as director of staff for Headquarters, Kentucky Air National Guard.

Pfeifer graduated with a bachelor's degree in mechanical engineering from North Carolina State University and received her commission through the Air Force Reserve Officer Training Corps in 1988.

She began her military career in the missile maintenance field, troubleshooting technical issues with intercontinental ballistic missiles and launch facilities.

After four years, she transitioned into the civil engineering career field, filling various positions at different active-duty and Air

National Guard wings, both in the United States and overseas, for the next 14 years.

In 2000, after a two-year break in service, she joined the Kentucky Air National Guard. Three years later, she was mobilized in support of Operation Iraqi Freedom and spent a tour of duty at Sather Air Base, Iraq, supporting civil engineering operations.

Upon her return to the United States, Pfeifer became the 123rd Airlift Wing's inspector general.

She followed the IG assignment by standing up the newly formed 123rd Force Support Squadron, merging the missions of the Military Personnel Flight and Services Flight under one guidon.

Pfeifer then moved to Headquarters, where she advised the chief of staff on the formulation of plans, policies and procedures, and provided coordination and staff assistance during state emergencies. Pfeifer also reviewed projected personnel policy changes for impact on existing plans and programs.

She finished her career leading the 123rd Mission Support Group, the wing's largest and most diverse unit.

During her retirement ceremony, Kraus presented Pfeifer with the Meritorious Service Medal, The Kentucky Distinguished Service Medal and the Certificate of Retirement.

"Part of me wishes I could go back in time, when things cost a lot less and were much simpler," Pfeifer said to the audience. "If I went back in time, I wouldn't have had the opportunity to work alongside so many of you, to get to know you, not just as a fellow Guardsman, but as a friend.

"Thank you."



Staff Sgt. Joshua Horton/KyANG

Col. Kathryn Pfeifer receives a Meritorious Service Medal during her retirement ceremony here Jan. 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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