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WRNMMC clinician wins the 2022 Senior Navy Psychologist of the Year Award

By Ricardo Reyes-Guevara

Walter Reed National Military Medical Center

WRNMMC, Bethesda, MD – U.S. Navy Lt. Cmdr. Michael A. Polito Jr., a psychologist with Walter Reed National Military Medical Center (WRNMMC), received the 2022 Senior Navy Psychologist of the Year Award on Dec. 9.

Polito was selected for the award from over 100 psychologists of similar rank across the entire U.S. Navy.



Michael A. Polito Jr.

“We are always so proud when our staff is recognized in any way, but we are exceptionally proud for Lt. Cmdr. Polito winning the Senior Navy Psychologist of the Year Award,” said U.S. Army Lt. Col. Shannon Ford, interim director of behavioral health directorate at WRNMMC. “Lt. Cmdr. Polito’s commitment to his patients and his willingness to serve in multiple leadership roles here at the hospital has been amazing and many have benefited from his excellent work. It’s a well-deserved honor.”

Over the past year, Polito held leadership positions in three directorates – deputy chief of Outpatient Behavioral Health Services at WRNMMC, director of the Naval Warrior Transition Company, and National Capital Region Child and Adolescent Behavioral Health Product Line chair.

About Walter Reed National Military Medical Center

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Modern-Day Minuteman makes history

First Air National Guard Flight Nurse receives Distinguished Flying Cross Medal

By Capt. Andrea Kostiuk
133rd Airlift Wing

Maj. Katie Lunning made history as the first Air National Guard Flight Nurse to be presented the Distinguished Flying Cross Medal, in front of family, friends, and members of the 133 Airlift Wing in St. Paul, Minnesota, Jan 7.

She was awarded the DFC for her actions as a Critical Care Air Transport Team (CCATT) nurse in support of Operation Allies Refuge and the evacuation of Kabul on August 26, 2021.

Lunning, who serves part time in the Minnesota Air National Guard, was working as an Intensive Care Unit (ICU) nurse manager at the Iowa VA Hospital when she learned of a short-notice deployment opportunity.

“The uniqueness of the guard is that the citizen airmen serve both their nation and their communities,” said Lt. Gen. Michael Loh, director, Air National Guard. “That is exactly what Katie does.”

The concept of the citizen airman dates back to the Revolutionary War, when minutemen were called upon to rapidly deploy to defend the colonies from attack. Today the minuteman is the symbol of the National Guard and Lunning the modern-day example.

When the nurse originally assigned to the deployment had to withdraw from the mission, Lunning packed her gear and within three short weeks of notification, was enroute to serve with the 379th Aeromedical Evacuation Squadron (AES) at Al Udeid Air Base in Qatar. The critical care nursing skills she was using day in and day out as an ICU nurse would soon save countless lives.



U.S. Air Force photo by Tech. Sgt. Amy Lovgren

U.S. Air Force Lt. Gen. Michael A. Loh, Director of the Air National Guard, fastens the Distinguished Flying Cross onto Maj. Katie Lunning’s uniform St. Paul, Minn., on Jan. 7. Loh’s visit was in honor of Lunning’s extraordinary actions during the evacuation of Kabul, Afghanistan on Aug. 26, 2021 which earned Lunning the Distinguished Flying Cross decoration.

Less than a month after she arrived, the transition of power in Afghanistan was announced. All personnel at Al Udeid Air Base were briefed on the deteriorating situation in Afghanistan and to be ready – although no one knew exactly for what. Around the same time, the two CCATT teams assigned to the 379th AES decreased to one: Lunning was now the only CCATT nurse in the region and thus assigned to every medical mission.

For two weeks, Lunning flew up to six missions a day to evacuate casualties from Hamid Karzai International Airport. Up to 36 times per day, she would trek three blocks pushing a stretcher through Taliban-controlled city streets to the Kabul Coalition Hospital. There, she received a critical patient ready for transport, exchanged equipment, and returned to the aircraft

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Veterinary Support Services conducts laboratory exercise

By Pvt. Samuel Signor

21st Theater Sustainment Command

KAISERSLAUTERN, Germany - The 64th Medical Detachment Veterinary Support Services held a laboratory exercise on Rhine Ordnance Barracks from Dec. 13 -15; where Soldiers were able to develop their skills and expand their knowledge in their work field.

LABEX events are held to not only benefit the Soldiers but also allow their supervisors to see what could be improved for the coming future.

"We are hoping to use this training to prepare us for our validation exercise in February," said Staff Sgt. Ruth Barajas,

64th MDVSS food procurement laboratory team non-commissioned officer in charge. "We hope to validate not only personnel but all team equipment to move towards participation in global health engagements with other European countries."

The event was conducted over three days with a new task each day. On the first day, the Soldiers went through chemical, biological, radiological, nuclear detection and decontamination. The second day, substance sample collection, lab submissions and sample plating was demonstrated and practiced. On the third and final day, Soldiers received their sample results and conducted a presentation to leaders.

"I hope they have gained a greater knowledge regarding proper laboratory practices, procedures and will be able to successfully apply them during real world events," said Barajas.

Leaders want their Soldiers to succeed and gain more understanding of what it is they do when it's time for their skills to be tested in real world events.

"They benefit from this because they are more prepared and more confident to carry out their job responsibilities more independently, more competently and more professionally in my opinion," said Sgt. Felicia Silva, 64th MDVSS FPLT team leader. "Because we're always rotating and doing different missions, we don't have time to think to ourselves and say, 'Hey, are we really proficient at our job?' So this type of training provides proficiency, efficiency, skill development, confidence and overall professionalism."

The Soldiers see the benefit for themselves more than anything, from learning new techniques, to seeing things that they've never used before. There's benefit for both leader and Soldier.

"We're able to give the commanders of the unit the information they need because we have a field lab set up, it gives us the utility in the field to allow us to test samples and relay that infor-



U.S. Army photo by Spc. Samuel Signor

A U.S. Army Soldier belonging to the 64th Medical Detachment Veterinary Support Services decontaminate an MRE on Dec. 13, 2022 on Rhine Ordnance Barracks, Kaiserslautern, Germany. The 64th MDVSS held a laboratory exercise and conducted chemical, biological, radiological, nuclear detection and decontamination training on their first day.

mation to those commanders," said Sgt. Deonte Collins, 64th MDVSS, team 5 NCO. "It gives us the opportunity to give them the knowledge on any situation with the food that they're eating and any possibility of contamination if need be."

There's a lot of coordination that goes into these events. Leaders have to communicate with other units to coordinate the needs of the exercise and be able to receive the supplies needed for proper training.

"We had to go through the 512th Field Hospital to get certain equipment needed to get our generators hooked up, our heaters working, we had to work with the Training Aids Services Center in Kaiserslautern to get lab equipment as well," said Silva. "We had to work with the dining facility here to make sure we were able to conduct our inspection and take live samples from their facility to be plated in our lab. As

well as CBRN personnel so they can give training on how to properly put on mission oriented protective posture (MOPP) gear and decontaminate food."

Collins said that he hopes more events will be held in the near future because he can see the huge upside to it, not only for himself but for his fellow Soldiers.

"I think the training has been interesting with doing new things, from the CBRN and decontaminating food in our MOPP gear in a tactical portion, to the lab portion which will be more hands-on, so it's two different dynamics from our job," said Collins. "I think this will help the unit become more productive and allow us to get a lot more done in more time."

The LABEX allows leaders to see the benefits that can be gained such as influencing other units to take notice and noticing Soldiers reactions from training events like this.

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U.S. Air National Guard photo by Staff Sgt. Austen Adriaens

U.S. Air Force Maj. Katie Lunning, 133rd Medical Group, received the Distinguished Flying Cross Decoration, Jan. 7, in St. Paul, Minn. Lunning was presented the nation's highest-flying award for her extraordinary actions during the evacuation of Kabul, Afghanistan on Aug. 26, 2021.

• **History** (Continued from front page)

with nothing more than her M-9 to protect her. After the day's missions were complete, she caught a couple hours of sleep and within hours was flying again. Her nursing heart was overflowing, but her body was exhausted.

August 26 began routine; Lunning had completed the day's missions and was almost asleep when her phone rang. It was the team doctor. "We need to report for duty in 20 minutes. Get dressed and go," he told her. Within 20 minutes she was back at the hangar and briefed on the situation in Kabul. A suicide bomber attacked the airport in Kabul, killed dozens and dozens more were injured. They were flying into danger and chaos.

Running on adrenaline in the face of imminent danger, she repeated her mantra, "Scary stuff we can't control." And she was off, down her familiar route in now hostile territory. Under small arms fire and the looming threat of a second suicide bomber, Lunning recalls focusing her mind on the patients that needed her. She performed patient triage and intake for 22 patients before they embarked on an eight-hour aeromedical evacuation flight to Landstuhl, Germany.

The skills of the ICU Nurse perfectly

complemented the CCATT nurse who saved multiple lives during that flight. From gaining intravenous access to an 18-month old patient with zero pediatric supplies to managing a lifesaving in-flight massive blood resuscitation of a post-operative patient, the skills from her civilian career kept her fighting for the patients that needed her expertise.

A mother herself, Lunning recalls interacting with the sibling of the critical 18-month old. "At one point I took her hand and placed it on the baby's and held it there. I wanted her to know that we cared and were doing our best to save her brother."

The modern-day minuteman, who rapidly deployed to serve her nation, displayed leadership, professional competence and aerial skill that culminated in all 22 lives saved during the single largest aeromedical evacuation airlift in Kabul Coalition Hospital's history.

"Thank you, Major Lunning, for your dedication to the mission, for your bravery under fire, serving our nation with your medical expertise, and your care for humanity. You make us all very proud," said Loh. "Ladies and gentlemen, I present to you a true American hero, Maj. Katie Lunning."

• **Award** (Continued from front page)

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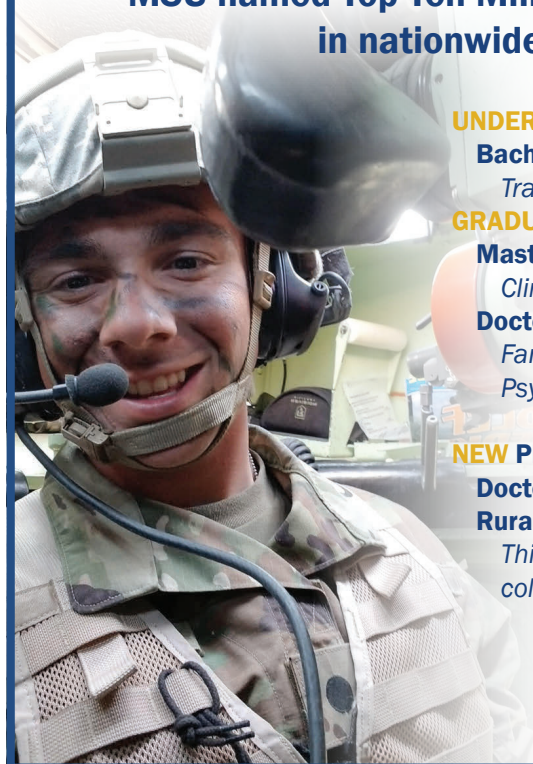
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Deputy Director, National Institute of Nursing Research National Institutes of Health Department of Health and Human Services

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