

AFA and USAF recognize the best Guard and Reserve airmen, crews, and units for their 1999 accomplishments.

Best of Guard and Reserve



Best Air National Guard Unit

Top ANG Unit of the Year
Members of the 172nd Fighter Squadron, 110th Fighter Wing, W.K. Kellogg Airport, Mich., served with distinction in Allied Force. Equipped with night vision capability, the O/A-10 squadron carried out close air support, forward air control, and combat search and rescue missions round-the-clock. One of only three ANG fighter units in Allied Force, the 172nd racked up 240 combat sorties totaling 800 hours, destroying and damaging Serb artillery and armor. Additionally, the squadron flew more than 4,400 hours safely in 1999, garnering them the ACC Flying Safety Award.
From the left: Maj. J.D. Van Havel and Jim Ewald are two of the 172nd's O/A-10 pilots.

Best Air Force Reserve Unit

Top AFRC Unit of the Year
During its second Persian Gulf deployment in six months, the 70th Air Refueling Squadron, 349th Air Mobility Wing, Travis AFB, Calif., flew 68 sorties supporting 677 Air Force, Navy, and coalition aircraft. The squadron's KC-10 aircraft off-loaded nearly 4 million pounds of fuel. When a Navy F/A-18 suffered a broken fuel probe, Maj. Bob Millmann and his crew assisted in the aircraft's safe recovery and landing. Barely a week after returning from their second Gulf deployment, the 70th ARS volunteered to support Allied Force. It maintained two crews in theater during the entire conflict, providing relief for exhausted active duty crews.

From the left are members of one 70th ARS aircrew: SSgt. Ernest Valles, Capt. Jeff Kozak, Col. Jim Lynott, and CMSgt. Karen Redd.



President's Award

Best Air Force Reserve Aircrew
A Total Force aircrew flying a KC-10 from the 70th ARS, Travis AFB, Calif., refueled six F-15Es, two F-16s, and one EC-130 aircraft (twice) at four separate rendezvous points in an intense 90-minute period during Allied Force. Only one was scheduled. Led by Reserve Capt. Jeffrey Pennington, 70th ARS, and augmented by active duty pilot Capt. Jeffrey McCleery, the crew off-loaded nearly 100,000 pounds of fuel within range of Serb missiles. Their cool professionalism enabled the fighter and EC-130 aircrews to complete their missions in a narrow window of clear weather, resulting in the destruction of a munitions storage building and an electrical power plant.
From the left: SSgt. Ernest Valles, Capt. Jeffrey Pennington, and MSgt. Jeffrey Pinto.



Photo by Paul Kennedy



Maj. Gen. Earl T. Ricks Award

Best Airmanship in the Air National Guard
A routine deployment to Iceland for Operation Coronet Norseman tested the leadership ability and tactical skills of Lt. Col. Randall G. Riccardi, F-15 pilot with ANG's 122nd Fighter Squadron, 159th Fighter Wing, NAS JRB New Orleans, during an unexpected confrontation with Russian bombers. Under his leadership, F-15s on alert successfully intercepted and turned back two Russian Tu-95 Bear bombers, the first real-world scramble in Iceland in more than eight years. Riccardi's professionalism and tactical skill earned praise from the admiral commanding NAS Keflavik, Iceland. Stateside, Riccardi also expertly trained more than half of the current pilots in the 159th FW, with no mishaps.

CMSgt. Dick Red Award

Best ANG Aerospace Maintenance
CMSgt. Thomas A. Childers, 121st Main Maintenance Squadron, 121st Air Refueling Wing, Rickenbacker IAP, Ohio, is responsible for avionics, propulsion, and accessory aircraft maintenance on the unit's KC-135R aircraft. Directing 177 maintenance personnel, Childers supervises the Pacer CRAG avionics mod-ernization program. He fostered a culture of safety in his flight by updating lockout/tagout procedures, and he consolidated tool kit instructions and procedures. His emphasis on top performance standards is matched by his concern for unit morale and cohesiveness: He played a key role in establishing the Deserving Airmen Pro-motion System, now a model program for the wing, and in strengthening the wing's Chief Council, a problem-solving organization with access to wing leadership.

