

MARCH 13, 2014

A Space & Missile Defense NewsWire

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HHC welcomes new "Top" NCO



Photo by Jason B. Cutshaw

Capt. Eric J. Sidio, left, commander, Headquarters and Headquarters Company, U.S. Army Space and Missile Defense Command/Army Forces Strategic Command, passes the noncommissioned officer's sword to 1st Sgt. Aaron W. Wheeler during the HHC Change of Responsibility at the command's Redstone Arsenal, Ala., headquarters March 6. Wheeler assumes responsibility from Sgt. 1st Class Charles H. Peters, who was acting first sergeant since 1st Sgt. Joshua Ochs left the command in November.



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U.S. Army Space and Missile Defense Command/Army Forces Strategic Command publishes the Eagle bi-weekly as a digital newswire. The newswire is an authorized publication of the USASMDC/ARSTRAT in accordance with AR 360-1. The SMDC commanding general has directed that the publication of this periodical is necessary in the transaction of the public business as required by law. The views and opinions expressed in the Eagle are not necessarily those of the Department of the Army or SMDC. The Eagle is intended to inform members of the command on happenings within the Army space and missile defense community. Distribution is made to the service members, civilians and contractors, and to the general public.

COMMANDING GENERAL

Lt. Gen. David L. Mann

COMMAND SERGEANT MAJOR

Command Sgt. Maj. James N. Ross

DEPUTY TO THE COMMANDER

Ronald E. Chronister

DEPUTY COMMANDING GENERAL FOR OPERATIONS

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NCO inducted into prestigious club



Photo by Sgt. Maj. David Poehlein

Command Sgt. Maj. James N. Ross, command sergeant major, U.S. Army Space and Missile Defense Command/Army Forces Strategic Command, pins an Army Commendation Medal on Sgt. Jason A. Schlegel, 49th Missile Defense Battalion, during Schlegel's induction ceremony into the Sergeant Audie Murphy Club on Feb. 26 at Fort Greely, Alaska. The Sergeant Audie Murphy Club is a prestigious club for exceptional noncommissioned officers.

ADA announces scholarships

The Huntsville Air Defense Artillery (ADA) Association announces its 2014 Space Camp Scholarship program. Huntsville-area applicants in grades 4 through 12 are welcome to apply.

All applicants must be related to a veteran or active duty military. Special consideration will be given to relatives of Air Defenders.

Winners will receive a fully

paid week-long scholarship for their choice of many programs at the Huntsville Space and Rocket Center, including Space Camp, Aviation Challenge, Robotics Academy, etc.

The deadline for submitting applications via postal mail is April 30. For more information and to download the application, visit www.HuntsvilleADAA.org.

CSM visits Soldiers serving in Alaska

Jason B. Cutshaw
SMDC Public Affairs

REDSTONE ARSENAL, Ala. – The senior enlisted member of the U.S. Army Space and Missile Defense Command/Army Forces Strategic Command visited Alaska and the command's Soldiers defending the nation during a trip Feb. 25-27.

USASMDC/ARSTRAT Command Sgt. Maj. James N. Ross visited command Soldiers and assets in Alaska to gain insight into what Soldiers in America's northern frontier endure and how the command can support them.

"Most of the issues they discussed with me were mission oriented," Ross said. "I didn't have one single Soldier come up to me and say I have a personal problem, which was great. That is a good sign the unit is doing well."

During his trip, Ross met with leaders at the Alaska Army National Guard headquarters to discuss intersecting lines between SMDC and the National Guard.

Ross then visited with Soldiers assigned to the 49th Missile Defense Battalion to learn about issues they may have.

"One of the things we're very proud of, and it's kind of a unit slogan, is they are the 300 defending 330 million," he added. "Their mission is 365 days a year, seven days a week. They don't get snow days; they don't get any time off; they are there standing watch defending our homeland.

"They are an extremely disciplined unit with an extremely hard mission. You would think because



Photo by Sgt. Maj. David Poehlein

Command Sergeant Major James N. Ross, U.S. Army Space and Missile Defense Command/Army Forces Strategic Command, talks with Military Police of the 49th Missile Defense Battalion during a visit to Fort Greely, Alaska, Feb. 25-27.

of the really remote location, the really harsh winter environment, the limited daylight hours during the winter months, and all of those challenges, to include resources, the Soldiers would be unmotivated," he added. "There is nothing easy about Fort Greely or being stationed there, but the morale there and attitudes are absolutely unbelievable. Because again, looking at some of the resiliency issues facing our Army, you would expect to see a lot of that at Fort Greely, and I didn't see any of those problems. What I saw was a dedicated, professional group of Soldiers focused on their core tasks and doing it with the right attitudes and a level of professionalism you won't see in every unit."

Ross conveyed to the Soldiers that

SMDC leadership supports them as they brave harsh conditions and thanks them for their service.

"When I visited the troops in August, one of the things they asked me was to come back and visit them during the winter season so I can really see what it is like in the cold, austere setting that is Fort Greely," Ross said. "It was cold, but it was nothing like what they are normally used to. Speaking with Lt. Gen. (David L.) Mann (SMDC commanding general) it was 30 below zero when he visited in December. The lowest I saw when I visited was about three below zero so it was not up to usual Fort Greely standards.

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Deputy to commander keynote speaker at APBI event

Jason B. Cutshaw
SMDC Public Affairs

REDSTONE ARSENAL, Ala. – The U.S. Army Space and Missile Defense Command/Army Forces Strategic Command's senior civilian spoke to community and industry leaders.

Ronald E. Chronister, deputy to the commander, USASMDC/ARSTRAT, was the keynote speaker at the Advance Planning Briefing for Industry at the Bob Jones auditorium in Redstone Arsenal's Sparkman Center March 11. APBI provides information on Army aviation and missile technology efforts and requirements as well as information on potential contract opportunities.

The briefings assist industry, research and academic partners to plan and prepare for future requirements with government contracts. APBI's purpose is to promote transparency in acquisition strategies by providing long-range technology and capability development objectives to industry as well as information on the potential business opportunities available with SMDC and other Team Redstone organizations.

"One of the issues with our command is that we are not very well known and we don't have the visibility a lot of Army commands do," Chronister said. "We are small, we are an ASCC (Army Service Component Command), and a lot of the work we do is classified and sensitive so this venue gives us an opportunity to talk about what we do, advertise that, and hopefully help industry as well."

APBI includes briefings on programs that will be issuing solici-



Photo by Jason B. Cutshaw

Ronald E. Chronister, deputy to the commander, U.S. Army Space and Missile Defense Command/Army Forces Strategic Command, speaks at the Advance Planning Briefing for Industry at the Bob Jones auditorium in the Redstone Arsenal, Ala., Sparkman Center March 11. APBI provides information on Army aviation and missile technology efforts and requirements as well as information on potential contract opportunities.

tations for competitive bids within an approximately three-to-five-year timeframe. APBI is unclassified and open to all interested contractors, large and small businesses, and academia as well as other government stakeholders.

One of SMDC's contract mechanisms is the Systems Engineering and Technical Assistance Contract, or SETAC. With SETAC, there have been 19 task orders, with a potential ceiling of \$369 million, that have been awarded to date. There is a remaining ceiling of \$628 million for future task order awards. In fiscal year 2014, six additional task orders for approximately \$135 million are to be awarded.

"The SETAC 10 is a multiple-award-indefinite delivery/indefinite quantity, or MA IDIQ, contract

with nine prime contractors," said Barbara Cantrell, acquisition management specialist and acquisition program manager for SETAC 10. "Task orders are competed among the prime contractors. The contract provides advisory and assistance services for systems engineering and technical assistance.

"These services support USASMDC/ARSTRAT and other associated air, space, missile defense organizations in support of their various air; space; missile defense; homeland security/homeland defense; Warfighter; and chemical, biological, radiological and nuclear missions as they are defined by higher headquarters, Congress and the Department of Defense," she added.

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Missile defense brigade top NCO passes torch

Staff Sgt. Benjamin Crane
100th Missile Defense Brigade

COLORADO SPRINGS, Colo. – The senior non-commissioned officer of the 100th Missile Defense Brigade (Ground-based Midcourse Defense) passed the sword to a new enlisted leader during a Change of Responsibility at the 4th Infantry Division Headquarters auditorium on Fort Carson Feb. 27.

Command Sgt. Maj. Russell Hamilton relinquished the responsibilities of looking after the brigade and its Soldiers to Command Sgt. Maj. Terry Alflen.

Hamilton said saying goodbye to the brigade with whom he has had a close relationship for the last 10 years is bittersweet. He said that he will miss the Soldiers of the 100th, but will do everything he can to support them from his new assignment as the Colorado National Guard's state command sergeant major.

"It seems to me that our time together has come and gone in a blink of an eye," said Hamilton. "Departing from the brigade is not something that comes easy for me or that I take lightly. That is because of the personal conviction that I feel for this brigade, its mission and its Soldiers, past and present, who have performed this mission."

He will be taking over for Command Sgt. Maj. Kenneth Berube at state headquarters in Centennial, Colo. The ceremony



Photos by Staff Sgt. Benjamin Crane

Command Sgt. Maj. Terry Alflen, 100th Missile Defense Brigade (Ground-based Midcourse Defense), holds the Noncommissioned Officer Sword during the brigade's Change of Responsibility Feb. 27 at the 4th Infantry Division headquarters auditorium at Fort Carson, Colo.

was scheduled for March 1.

Taking over at the brigade will be Alflen, whose last assignment was at the Regional Training Institute, Fort Carson.

"I can't think of a better person to take over a brigade from," Alflen said about Hamilton during his speech. "You've been a good friend, a good confidant and you taught me to do this job. So thank you for having faith in me and my abilities, and to Col. Hildreth, I won't let you down."

Alflen is a 2005 graduate of the United States Army Sergeants' Major Academy and has completed every level of the Noncommissioned Officer Education System. Alflen has also completed numerous military

courses in the field of aviation. Alflen is currently completing a bachelor's degree in information technology from Aurora College.

His significant awards include the Bronze Star, Meritorious Service Medal, Army Commendation Medal (two oak leaf clusters), Army Achievement Medal (two oak leaf clusters), Good Conduct Medal (seventh award), the Iraqi Campaign Medal, Global War on Terror Service Medal, the Combat Action Badge and the Master Aviation Badge.

Alflen and his wife, Nicole, have one son, Staff Sgt. Derek Alflen, who also serves in the Colorado Army National Guard with the 131st Aviation Maintenance Company.

Deadline for comments and submissions for the March 27 issue is March 21.
Please submit to Jason B. Cutshaw at Jason.B.Cutshaw.civ@mail.mil.

Reserve commander attends graduation

Scott Andreae
USASMDC/ARSTRAT SIG

PETERSON AIR FORCE BASE, Colo. – The top officer of a wide-ranging Army Reserve command was the guest speaker Feb. 27 for a graduating class of new space officers largely composed of Army Reserve and National Guard service members.

Maj. Gen. Dan York, commander of the 76th Operational Response Command, encouraged the Space Operations Officer Qualifying Course graduates to apply leadership, vision, teamwork, character, attitude, conduct and wisdom in their professional lives.

The Troop Program Unit at U.S. Army Space and Missile Defense Command/Army Forces Strategic Command is part of the 76th ORC. The TPU has about 280 Army Reserve Soldiers who work in the 1st Space Brigade, Missile Defense Integrated Operations Center, various USASMDC/ARSTRAT staff directorates and U.S. Northern Command/North American Air Defense Command, among others.

The graduating class had eight Army Reserve students, five from the Army National Guard and one active duty. Graduates of the course become Functional Area 40 space operations officers. York emphasized to the graduates their important roles in the multi-component Army, both in the specialized career field of military space and in leading people.

“You’re leaders by virtue of wearing the uniform,” he said. “How can we keep space where it needs to be in terms of importance



Photo by Scott Andreae

Maj. Gen. Dan York addresses graduates of the Army Space Operations Officer Qualifying Course, Feb. 27. York is commanding general of the Army Reserve’s 76th Operational Response Command.

both in defense and where we need to go next as a nation?”

He gave examples of behavior and qualities from his time in Ranger School, at Fort Rucker, Ala., and as a company commander in the 101st Airborne Division. York focused on seven aspects:

Leadership – “Intentionally work at building the bench. Make sure people are placed where they fit and where their strengths are.”

Vision – “Strategic thinking is imperative in space. How are you going to look ahead and see things?”

Teamwork – “In your FA40 community you’re a team. You guys have all got to get along and talk.”

Character – “Protect your character with all of your passion, might and discernment. You represent space and you represent yourselves.”

Attitude – “Are you going to come in motivated and challenged to make a difference with the people around you?”

Conduct – “Treat others the way

you want to be treated. Know your material; lives are at stake.”

Wisdom – “Think before you act. Be professional. You will endure and people will want to follow you.”

The 76th ORC is headquartered in Salt Lake City, Utah. It provides command and control for 19 specialized Army Reserve units and Army Reserve Elements that operationally support combatant commands, Department of Defense agencies and Army commands, including SMDC.

Graduates of Space Operations Officer Qualifying Course class 14-01 are Capt. Nathaniel D. Balough, Maj. Viki R. Binstock, Maj. Andrew Craig, 1st Sgt. Vanessa J. Frederick, Maj. Chad J. Haman, Col. Steven A. Matayoshi, Staff Sgt. Michael W. Mitchell, Maj. David E. Pyatt, Maj. Gregory S. Robinson, Maj. Adam C. Stanley, Capt. Jennifer L. Staton, Capt. Brian J. Weimer, Lt. Col. Jonathan C. Williams and 1st Lt. Ben Wilson.

History: Final ERIS launch

Sharon Watkins Lang
SMDC command historian

According to the historical report from the Ground Based Interceptor, or GBI, Project Office, “the most significant event of Fiscal Year 1992 was the final ERIS Functional Technology Verification, or FTV, flight, which occurred on March 13, 1992.”

The Exoatmospheric Re-entry vehicle Interceptor Subsystem, or ERIS, was established in the 1980s. Selected as one of the components for the Strategic Defense Initiative, ERIS was subsequently deemed a high priority in 1986. The project was established on the basis that the ERIS sub-system was not only low risk, but was also low cost and near-term deployable.

The functional technology verification phase began in 1989 with the delivery of the first system. The first of five scheduled flight tests took place in January 1991 with a successful intercept of a mock re-entry vehicle, or RV. Two later tests were aborted before launch, and in early 1992, the mission schedule was reduced from five flights to two.

This change made the March 13 flight particularly significant. Emphasis was placed on collecting the most data possible before the planned intercept. Mission objectives included collecting and providing target data to the kill vehicle and “endgame tactics” – aimpoint selection and discrimination and target selection with the target RV part of amid closely spaced objects with one-color and two-color radiometric data.

To collect the most data as possible, a one-second delay was built into the test sequence prior to the final divert maneuver. The ERIS, using infrared intensity discrimination data, correctly selected the RV from the decoy balloon and identified the aimpoint on the RV. As a result of the one-second delay, however, the ERIS flying between the kill-vehicle and the balloon missed the target vehicle by a few meters.

The ERIS sensors continued to collect data providing researchers with information on the kill-vehicle, or KV, itself – the KV’s reentry into the earth’s atmosphere, infrared sensor background, KV stability and KV temperature profiles. This additional data would illustrate the potential for lower level intercepts. Ultimately it was determined that “the kill vehicle performed as designed in all aspects, although test data



Department of Defense photo

The Exoatmospheric Re-entry vehicle Interceptor Subsystem, or ERIS, named for the Greek goddess of discord, is in its launch silo on Meck Island in the Republic of the Marshall Islands. The ERIS program brought a number of upgrades and modifications to the facilities on Meck.

collection requirements over-constrained the KV such that it did not have sufficient timeline to compete the remaining divert.”

On July 31, 1992, the GBI FTV program officially closed. Later that summer, ERIS and the GBI Project Office, as part of the National Missile Defense program, transitioned to the newly established Program Executive Office for Global Protection Against Limited Strikes, now known as PEO Missiles and Space.

Silent auction raises nearly \$2,000 for AER

Photo by Carrie E. David



The U.S. Army Space and Missile Defense Command/Army Forces Strategic Command's silent auction for the Army Emergency Relief campaign raises more than \$1,900. Pictured, from left, are: John Robinson, Georgia football; KC Bertling, SMDC AER coordinator; Christina Ryan, baseball; and Sam Bertling, Army football. Not pictured are: Paula Majors, Alabama football; Rhonda Norris, Auburn football; Glenn Whorley, Purdue football; Lt. Col. Herron Roderick, Florida State University football, Mississippi State University football and Louisiana State University football; Angela Brown, Texas Longhorns football; Lt. Col. Ross Cline, South Carolina University football; Jan Schwartzbart, Stallworth football.

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Another contract mechanism used by SMDC is the Test Execution Services and Launch Augmentation, or TESTLA. TESTLA acquisition was planned as a competitive bridge between SMDC's Lethality Testing and Criteria Development contract and the planned Design, Development, Demonstration and Integration, or D3I, acquisition.

TESTLA has a \$220 million program-level ceiling that is shared by all awardees.

Awardees compete in technical support areas such as: flight tests; ground tests; payloads; electronic warfare; directed energy; conventional and asymmetric threats; telemetry and sensors; power and energy; cyber and space; surveillance and reconnaissance; experimental, phenomenology and component; and modeling and simulation.

Potential requirements are currently in planning stages for execution in FY 2014: nuclear arms control technologies; directed energy high energy laser; high-powered microwave lethality; and extended air defense simulation.

"The Test Execution Services and Launch Augmentation MA IDIQ consists of five prime contractors, who compete for each task order, or description of government requirements," said Denise Jones, an engineer in the SMDC Technical Center, and the TESTLA contracting officer's representative. "TESTLA is a flexible, competitive contracting vehicle that fulfills a gap in the command's ability to design, develop, demonstrate and integrate hardware and software products focused on meeting near-term requirements until the award of the Design, De-

velop, Demonstrate and Integrate effort."

D3I currently has approximately \$4.6 billion in proposals for all domains received in December and January and these are currently under evaluation, with contract awards anticipated to be made in November 2015.

Before leaving, Chronister spoke about the importance of events like APBI and how forums like these assist in the command's focus on ultimately supporting the Warfighter.

"The more visibility we have, the more industry understands what our capabilities are, what our mission is, and industry can better align themselves because they are a key part of the process," he said. "They are a key partner and the better we are partnered, the better we all collectively can support the Warfighter."

USACE deputy commander visits SMDC



Photo by Carrie E. David

Col. Dewey A. Granger, chief of staff, U.S. Army Space and Missile Defense Command/Army Forces Strategic Command, left, and Richard P. De Fatta, director, Emerging Technology Directorate, SMDC Technical Center, greet Maj. Gen. Kendall Cox, deputy commander, Military and International Operations, U.S. Army Corp of Engineers, at SMDC's Redstone Arsenal, Ala., headquarters Feb. 28. Cox visited the command to learn more about what SMDC does for the Army and the nation.

Command engineer/former chief of staff retires



Photo by Carrie E. David

Col. Jeffrey S. Ogden, deputy chief of staff, engineer, U.S. Army Space and Missile Defense Command/Army Forces Strategic Command, addresses his father, retired Lt. Col. Dick Ogden, during his retirement at the Von Braun III auditorium on Redstone Arsenal, Ala., March 7. Ogden, who also served as the command's chief of staff, retires with 30 years of service.

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“In cold or colder, it is a very important unit to the command and it was really important to get up there and spend some time with them,” he added.

During the visit, Ross had sessions with the battalion’s noncommissioned officers and

Soldiers where they covered Sexual Harassment/Assault Response and Prevention, the Army profession, resiliency, developmental counseling, Army downsizing, and standards and discipline.

“They are getting ready to transition with a new command sergeant

major, and I wanted to get there and continue talking with them about the importance of their mission to the Army, to the homeland and at the same time make sure that I continue to focus on my messaging, which is the Army and NCO profession,” Ross said.

Soldier chooses duty above self

Carrie E. David
SMDC Public Affairs

REDSTONE ARSENAL, Ala. – Every American Soldier is familiar with and strives to live by the seven Army values, but for one U.S. Army Space and Missile Defense Command/Army Forces Strategic Command Soldier, despite receiving a life-changing diagnosis in 2013, he continues to serve and to live by them all: Loyalty, Duty, Respect, Selfless Service, Honor, Integrity, and Personal Courage.

Staff Sgt. David L. Thomas, noncommissioned officer in charge, S-2, 1st Space Battalion, was diagnosed with Stage IV lung cancer that metastasized to the brain in April 2013, but has chosen to continue his service.

“I was given a prognosis of six to 18 months survival rate,” Thomas said. “What I was most disappointed about at that moment was the fact that I was selling Beth (his wife) and our children short. Second was the fact that I would no longer be here serving in the U.S. Army doing what was the most important thing: overseeing the safety of my family and our great country via my service.”

Thomas enlisted two weeks after the terrorist attacks of Sept. 11, 2001, in the Delayed Entry Program. Upon enlisting, he intended to be a career service member.

“Joining the Army was something that was always on my mind since I was a child,” Thomas said. “The attacks made up my mind for me. Defending my family and America itself was no longer an option, but rather a duty. There was no time left to ponder; it was a matter of how fast I could sign up.”

Six days before his 35th birthday, Thomas reported for Basic Combat Training at Fort Benning, Ga. His wife, Elizabeth, had just recently begun law school, but they decided this is what he had to do.

In March 2004, Thomas deployed to Iraq for the first time. After 13 months in Baghdad and a few months at home, he deployed again in September 2005, back to Baghdad. He returned home in January 2007, reclassified his job specialty, and in December 2008 deployed to Northern Iraq, first to Kirkuk and then to Mosul. He returned home in September 2009 and began preparing for his next deployment, this time to Kandahar, Afghanistan, in May 2011. It was during this fourth deployment that he began to notice a prevalent



Courtesy photo

Staff Sgt. David L. Thomas, noncommissioned officer in charge, G-2, 1st Space Battalion, poses with his wife, Elizabeth McCrocklin Thomas, following his Army Space Badge ceremony in January. Thomas was diagnosed with Stage IV lung cancer that metastasized to the brain in April 2013.

and chronic cough. He returned from this deployment in May 2012, and in October 2012, Thomas transferred to the 1st Space Battalion headquarters in Colorado Springs, Colo.

“I saw a doctor in January 2013, and was told I had an upper respiratory infection or the flu,” Thomas said. “I did not receive any diagnostic testing such as a chest X-ray or lung function test. I was given an antibiotic and sent on my way.”

Elizabeth had begun insisting that he go to the doctor because of the chronic cough, and finally on April 19, Thomas decided to seek medical advice.

“My wife and I were in bed watching TV when I had an episode of chest pain. I thought I had a mild heart attack,” Thomas said. “The next morning I went to the emergency room since sick call could not see me for chest pain.”

After diagnostic testing, Thomas was informed that he had a nodule in his medial left lobe, and additional doctor visits and testing were conducted.

“It was the day after my 46th birthday that I was diagnosed,” Thomas said. “I also learned that I had

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actually had lung cancer for more than two years, including during my last deployment to Afghanistan.”

Elizabeth said her initial reaction was shock.

“I remember thinking, ‘I can’t believe I’m hearing these words,’” she said. “I felt cheated. This was the first time in a while we were going to have uninterrupted family time free from deployment. I thought we were going to have all of this time together.”

He began treatment in May 2013.

“I determined to fight cancer and have been undergoing chemotherapy,” Thomas said. “I have also undergone two cyberknife procedures to my brain for tumors and a week of radiation to my chest.”

Through it all, Thomas has continued moving forward in his Army career, earning badges and awards for excellence even as recently as January when he was awarded the Army Space Badge.

In addition to the Army Space Badge, Thomas has earned over the course of his 11-year career: six Army Commendation Medals, two Army Achievement Medals, three Army Good Conduct Medals, the National Defense Service Medal, Afghanistan Campaign Medal with two campaign stars, the Iraq Campaign Medal with six campaign stars, the Global War on Terrorism Expeditionary Medal, the Global War on Terrorism Service Medal, two Noncommissioned Officer Professional Development Ribbons for the Warrior Leader Course and the Advanced Leader Course, the Overseas Service Ribbon with the numeral four for four deployments, Armed Forces Reserve Medal, and the NATO Medal Ribbon.

Also, he was twice part of units that received Meritorious Unit Commendations.

According to Capt. Adrian Donnahoe, Headquarters and Headquarters Company commander, 1st Space Battalion, Thomas’ dedication is inspiring.

“David has been so much more than just an inspiration,” Donnahoe said. “His patriotism has reminded so many of us that our jobs as Soldiers mean so much more than just ourselves. I truly wish there were more Americans who felt the way David does about the importance of serving. Through David’s fight both internally and externally without complaint, we are witness to his courage and commitment to complete the mission. I am truly a better person for serving in the same ranks with David, and I am blessed to know him and his family.”

Thomas, however, does not feel like he is doing anything extraordinary.

“Never did quitting my career in the U.S. Army cross my mind,” Thomas said. “Nor will I allow this illness to prematurely cause me to leave the Army. If it is up to me, I will be a member of the armed forces until the day I do leave this world to be with my father in heaven.

“I have made a decision that I will not let cancer change my duty to my country, family or friends,” he said. “I will fight cancer and continue to work as long as I am able. I will continue to place the mission first while acting with professionalism and continuing to mentor my NCOs and Soldiers.”

Upon learning of his cancer, Thomas began to research what could have caused it.

“I began to uncover the research

and studies on Iraq Afghanistan War Lung disease, and the devastating effects of the ‘burn pits’ on service members and civilians who have served overseas,” Thomas said. “Through my research I learned that IAWL is a chronic pulmonary condition that will affect one in seven service members who have served overseas. While Veterans Affairs and the services have not officially recognized IAWL or the effects of the burn pits, there are a lot of people suffering and awareness of IAWL needs to be brought to the public’s attention.”

Thomas established the David Thomas IAWL Foundation to promote awareness of the disease.

“Eventually, through fundraising, we hope that the foundation has enough funds to provide basic testing for veterans or active duty service members who might need to determine if they have IAWL,” Thomas said. “In many ways, through my foundation, my last mission is to bring awareness to IAWL and those who are suffering.”

Elizabeth said that her husband is her hero.

“David kept saying, ‘I’m never going to deploy again. I need to be able to. It’s my job,’” she said. “He loves what he does. He’s always saying he wished he could do more; that what he’s done isn’t enough. He’s a hero to me. Not just that he’s kept going, but his whole Army career.

“Even with all of this, he doesn’t take the praise,” Elizabeth added. “But just by getting up every day and going to work, he shows everyone that he doesn’t quit. He always replies with, ‘Where else would I be?’”