

South Dakota National Guard

Public Affairs Office

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE:

August 7, 2020

SD National Guard selects Warrant Officer of the Year

RAPID CITY, S.D. – The South Dakota Army National Guard selected a Woonsocket man as its Warrant Officer of the Year and recipient of the Chief Warrant Officer 4 Michael F. O’Connor Award.

Chief Warrant Officer 3 Joel Rassel, primary training, advising, and counseling officer for 1st Battalion, 196th Regional Training Institute, received the award as the most exceptional warrant officer after competing against warrant officers from several of the SDARNG’s major commands.

The CW4 Michael F. O’Connor Award was established in 2000 to recognize the most outstanding SDARNG Warrant Officer of the past year. Criterion for the award is based on exceptional qualities of technical knowledge, leadership, dedication and initiative.

“It’s a great honor to receive this award,” said Rassel. “I’ve seen others that I respect win this award and it is really neat to be honored with it.”

“The reputation of Mr. Rassel as a disciplined, articulate, capable soldier – willing and able to help his unit, its candidates, and fellow cadre – supported our goal of leaving the organization better than we found it,” said Lt. Col. Troy Ness, 1-196th RTI commander. “Respectful to subordinates, peers and commanders at all levels, he mirrors the reputation of the man in which the Chief Warrant Officer 4 Michael F. O’Connor Warrant Officer of the year award is named.”

Rassel enlisted in the SDARNG in 1992 and was assigned to the 665th Maintenance Company in Mitchell. Over the next 28 years, he served in many different units including Company B, 139th Brigade Support Battalion; Forward Support Company, 1-147th Field Artillery Battalion; and the 1-196th RTI.

Rassel is also a war veteran and completed a deployment to Iraq and Kuwait in 2011 with the 139th Brigade Support Battalion.

In addition to his military duties, Rassel holds many positions in his hometown of Woonsocket, including commander of American Legion Post 29, city council member and volunteer firefighter.

“My career has been a great experience and has helped prepare me and my community for the future,” said Rassel. “Everything I do through the military I transfer back to my family and my community. My family and the community make me stronger in the military and the military makes me stronger for my family and community.”

Other warrant officers representing their major command for this year’s award were CW3 Sandi Pasqualucci, Joint Force Headquarters; CW4 Seth Mendel, 196th Regional Training Institute; and WO1 David Goodwin, 196th Maneuver Enhancement Brigade.

“This is not a me award, this is an us award,” said Rassel. “This is me and my wife and my family’s award. Without them I would not be able to go and do what I do in the National Guard. They are the ones

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taking care of all of my jobs at home while I am gone. Thank you to my wife Dawn Russel, my kids, my family and my entire community.”

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High resolution photos are available upon request.



U.S. Army Chief Warrant Officer 3 Joel Russel and his wife Dawn accept the Chief Warrant Officer 4 Michael F. O'Connor award at Joint Force Headquarters, Camp Rapid, Rapid City, S.D., August 1, 2020. The CW4 Michael F. O'Connor Award was established in 2000 to recognize the most outstanding SDARNG Warrant Officer of the past year. (U.S. Army National Guard photo by Pfc. Alexis Stevens)

FOR MORE INFORMATION, please contact the SDNG Public Affairs Office at (605) 737-6721 or e-mail ng.sd.sdarng.list.pao@mail.mil