



Twelfth Annual
U.S. MISSILE DEFENDER
of the YEAR
AWARD CEREMONY

January 14, 2022
Alexandria, Virginia



SEQUENCE OF EVENTS
U.S. MISSILE DEFENDER *of the* YEAR AWARD CEREMONY

Call to Order

National Anthem

Welcoming Remarks

Dinner

Remarks

Service Components Present their Defender *of the* Year

Closing Remarks by Mr. Riki Ellison

AWARD HISTORY



Defender of the Year

January 14, 2011 marked the inaugural Defender of the Year Award Ceremony, recognizing and honoring members of our military who command fully operational and deployed missile defense systems. Each year the award is given to a United States Armed Forces service member from each branch that currently deploys a U.S. missile defense system for their outstanding work in the previous year. These selected individuals represent the best in leadership and personal effort, demonstrating their commitment to excellence and their critical role in missile defense. They are an inspiration to their subordinates, peers, and superiors.

The purpose of this award is to recognize exceptional individuals and their role in defending our homeland, armed forces, and allies. Recognizing them helps to educate the American public and inspire those they work with to defend our nation.

The Defenders of the Year are selected by their peers and commanding officers from the U.S. Army, U.S. Navy, U.S. Air Force, U.S. National Guard, and the U.S. Space Force.

We want to thank all those who have supported MDAA for over a decade to fulfill its mission to educate the American public on the need for our nation to develop and deploy missile defense.

ABOUT MDAA



The Missile Defense Advocacy Alliance

MDAA's mission is to make the world safer by advocating for the development and deployment of missile defense systems to defend the United States, its armed forces, and its allies against missile threats.

MDAA is the only organization in existence whose primary mission is to educate the American public about missile defense issues and to recruit, organize, and mobilize citizens to advocate for the critical need of missile defense. We are a non-profit organization that does not advocate on behalf of any specific system, technology, architecture, or entity.

MDAA was founded by Riki Ellison in 2002 to generate public support through education for the continued testing, development, and deployment of missile defense systems.



U.S. MISSILE DEFENDER of the YEAR



Chief Warrant Officer 2 Jeremy Howard

CW2 Howard is the Air Defense Artillery (ADA) Command and Control (C2) Systems Integrator for 3rd Battalion, 265th ADA Regiment. From November 2020 to October 2021, CW2 Howard deployed in support of Short-Range Air Defense (SHORAD) operations within Operation Inherent Resolve, Operation Enduring Freedom, and Operation Spartan Shield. CW2 Howard was responsible for the SHORAD integration and defense of critical assets within Central Command (CENTCOM) across the United Arab Emirates (UAE), Iraq, and the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia (KSA). CW2 Howard's integration efforts enhanced theater-wide Early Warning of one-way attack UAS, improved base defense efforts, developed innovative Tactics, Techniques, and Procedures for FIM-92 Stinger interceptors, and enhanced the regional air picture to enable more effective C-UAS engagements. During the height of operations in theater, he directly supported assured protection of three of the top assets on the CENTCOM Prioritized Critical Asset List and was responsible for the Joint Data Network's coverage of the 120,000 square kilometers airspace over Central and Northern Iraq and Eastern Syria. CW2 Howard continuously improved the operations by leading integration efforts between Army, Marines, and Air Force to ensure readiness against UAS across CENCTOM. CW2 Howard was also instrumental in establishing record times to Full Operational Capability status in KSA and Iraq. He improved the network architecture to enhance situational awareness resulting in early identification of a KAS-o4 drone enroute to Camp Bashur and the National Guard's historic SHORAD engagement of threat aircraft. CW2 Howard was born in Ft. Myers, Florida in October 1983 but currently lives in Saint Augustine, Florida with his wife Melissa Howard. After graduating with a High School Diploma, he entered the Florida Army National Guard in February 2002. He completed an Associate's Degree in General Studies and a Bachelor's of Science in Athletic Training from Florida Gulf Coast University and then a Masters of Health Science in Athletic Training with a Certificate of Leadership and Administration in Athletic Training from the University of St. Augustine. CW2 Howard earned an Educational Doctorate in Health Sciences degree with Specialization in Teaching and Learning through the University of St. Augustine in 2021, completing his dissertation while deployed in CENTCOM. CW2 Howard served as both an Avenger Crewmember and Early Warning Systems Operator during his enlisted career.



U.S. MISSILE DEFENDER of the YEAR



Sergeant First Class Matthew Crain

SFC Crain was most recently the Non-Commissioned Officer in Charge (NCOIC) of the Intelligence Section (S-2) at the 38th Air Defense Artillery (ADA) Brigade, at Sagami, Japan. SFC Crain is a Non-Commissioned Officer (NCO) of the highest order; his impeccable reliability, superior integrity, and selfless devotion to Air Defense and the Army profession is remarkable. SFC Crain's leadership was extremely important to the 38th ADA Brigade during 2021. He was selected to act as Headquarters and Headquarters Battery (HHB) First Sergeant during a crucial period of high operational tempo for the Brigade. Despite being one of the most junior Sergeants First Class at the Headquarters, he was chosen to lead and advise the battery through critical operations which included the first Patriot Live Fire in Australia during Talisman Sabre 21, U.S. Indo-Pacific Command-level command post exercise Pacific Sentry 21, and the Brigade's external evaluation during Combined Command Post Training 21-2. SFC Crain was exactly the right NCO for the job, as all missions were met with success and the Soldiers, NCOs, and Officers maintained operational readiness and high morale through a stressful period—all while still under COVID-19 pandemic conditions. SFC Crain was born in Fort Lewis, Washington on June 12, 1991. He graduated from Shadow Mountain High School in Phoenix, Arizona in 2009 and enlisted in the U.S. Army in 2010. He attended Basic Combat Training in Fort Benning, Georgia where he graduated as the Distinguished Honor Graduate and was promoted to the rank of Private E-2. He continued onto Advanced Individual Training at Fort Sill, Oklahoma and earned the Military Occupational Specialty of Air Defense Command, Control, Communications, Computers, and Intelligence Tactical Operations Center Enhanced Operator/Maintainer. His deployments include Operation Enduring Freedom and Operation Resolute Support. As an NCO, SFC Crain's assignments include Team Leader (Bagram, Afghanistan), Team Leader (Aberdeen Proving Grounds, Maryland), Squad Leader (Aberdeen Proving Grounds, Maryland), Sentinel Section Sergeant (Fort Stewart, Georgia), Battle Systems Operator (Sagami Depot, Japan), and Battle Systems Manager (Sagami Depot, Japan). SFC Crain is currently enrolled at American Military University and is working on a Visual Communications Degree. He has earned the Parachutist Badge and the Drivers Badge. He is a member of the prestigious Sergeant Audie Murphy Association since 2020.



U.S. MISSILE DEFENDER of the YEAR



Lieutenant Kristen Ringwall

LT Ringwall is the Fire Control Officer for the USS Howard (DDG-83), homeport at Yokosuka, Japan. Upon LT Ringwall's arrival, the USS Howard was completing a modernization upgrade after being fitted with Baseline 9.C.2. LT Ringwall built the USS Howard's Ballistic Missile Defense (BMD) program from the ground up. She trained her ship's combat team throughout the entirety of Basic, Integrated, and Advanced phases in Air Warfare, BMD, and Surface Warfare. LT Ringwall also led the USS Howard's combat team during 80 scenarios, 20 of which she developed herself within the training program and prepared the combat team so well they earned rare T1 scores in three different BMD assessments. In 2021, LT Ringwall spearheaded the Missile Defense Agency's At Sea Demo-01, where USS Howard was the first ever Aegis ship to track single and simultaneous Resident Space Objects base on Space Command and Communications directed tasking. LT Ringwall worked directly with the Space Force while simultaneously creating the Navy's first Special Access Protocol at Sea program to support the mission. LT Ringwall also led the USS Howard's combat team in two BMD Readiness Exercises, coordinating between Japanese, American, and South Korean forces. Her efforts led to the successful testing of the communications and link structure needed to jointly defend the homeland. LT Ringwall's 17 Sailors in Combat Fire Control division have taken her drive and multiplied it as technicians. Not once over the past two years has SPY, Fire Control System, or Aegis been down for more than a couple of hours. LT Ringwall hails from Milton, Georgia, is a graduate of the University of Notre Dame, and commissioned through the Notre Dame Naval ROTC program. As a student, she majored in Science-Business and was involved in Student Government. She is fluent in Spanish and studied for six months in Santiago, Chile. Upon commissioning, LT Ringwall reported to the USS Howard in San Diego, California and deployed to Fifth Fleet with Carrier Strike Group 11 as the ship's Main Propulsion Officer. Between tours, LT Ringwall was the youngest-ever graduate (23) of the Integrated Air and Missile Defense Warfare Tactics Instructor course and earned the course's "Top Tactician" award. LT Ringwall then earned the Honor Graduate distinction at the Advanced Division Officer Course.



U.S. MISSILE DEFENDER of the YEAR



Major Robert Heath Matthews

Maj Matthews is the Chief for Defensive Operations at the 603d Air Operations Center, Ramstein Air Base, Germany. He expertly led his Integrated Air and Missile Defense (IAMD) team, consisting of 16 joint missile defense professionals, responsible for defending two combatant commands, integrating ten global agencies with coalition and partner nations in three continents. During heightened tensions and in response to an increased ballistic missile threat, Maj Matthews secured the Area Air Defense Commander's approval for an increased ballistic missile defense (BMD) posture. In doing so, he ensured assets were appropriately postured and hostile aggression was deterred. As the IAMD Training Officer, Maj Matthews led 40 weekly training events, exercising and validating the entire BMD kill-chain from Area Air Defense Command and Control to joint and coalition sensors and shooters. He personally trained five General Officers on the theater's BMD mission. Maj Matthews' team monitored over 80 actual and countless simulated theater ballistic missile launches in support of training, capability testing, missile warning and defense exercises. Additionally, Maj Matthews was a key player during European Command's Astral Knight exercise, a joint, multinational air defense exercise that demonstrates synergistic effects of surface-to-air and air-to-air capabilities like Aegis, Patriot, and airborne assets against ballistic and cruise missile threats. His invaluable inputs and leadership led to the establishment of a Joint Theater Air and Missile Defense Board, apprising Senior Leaders of the IAMD Design and capabilities of the Missile Defense architecture. Maj Matthews' actions resulted in 2000 Coalition personnel trained and the successful execution of European Command's capstone IAMD Exercise. Maj Matthews is a 2007 graduate of Officer Training School and is a Senior Remotely Piloted Aircraft Pilot with over 1,200 flight hours in the MQ-9 Reaper. He has executed Intelligence, Surveillance, and Reconnaissance and Attack missions in support of two Combatant Commanders and four Operational Missions from his Special Operations unit at Cannon Air Force Base (AFB), New Mexico. He completed a combat deployment to Bagram Air Base in 2015 in support of the Combined Joint Special Operations Air Component – Afghanistan. Prior to his current assignment, Maj Matthews was the Chief of Wing Plans and Programs at Holloman AFB, New Mexico in support of the MQ-9 and F-16 Formal Training Units.



U.S. MISSILE DEFENDER of the YEAR



Technical Sergeant X. Victor Kearney

TSgt Kearney is a Missile Warning and Defense Operator at U.S. Indo-Pacific Command at Camp H. M. Smith, Hawaii. As a Missile Defender, TSgt Kearney is in coordination with 67 entities and has dissemination responsibilities to seven subordinate commands with oversight of 375 thousand joint personnel on an ever changing, high stakes operating environment encompassing the world's largest area of responsibility. Through his expertise, TSgt Kearney is able to establish continuity in high operations tempo and high turnover environments to ensure the highest level of operations are achieved. Specifically, his initiative and utilization of prior North American Aerospace Defense Command (NORAD) Missile Defender experience has set the bar for his peers, through training five Joint Operations Center teams, consisting of 48 joint personnel comprising eight different duty descriptions, on missile system indications and battle staff processes. Most notably, TSgt Kearney's operator knowledge led to a rapid assessment of a recent adversary missile launch which demonstrated never before seen capabilities. His continued thoroughness following the launch synced data points from seven entities leading to the creation of five job aids, six checklist changes and additional training of five Joint Operations Center Directors, ensuring they have technical knowledge to provide timely and accurate assessments when encountering similar "unusual" indications. Similarly, his meticulous attention to detail identified two critical server errors, which led to a network server audit that restored missile warning monitoring capabilities for 24 million allied civilians. TSgt Kearney enlisted in the Air Force on December 7, 2007. After completing Basic Training and graduating from the Satellite Command and Control Course at Vandenberg Space Force Base (SFB), California, he was assigned to Schriever SFB, Colorado as his first duty station working as a SGLS/AEHF Operator for the MILSTAR constellation. His second duty location was Peterson SFB, Colorado, where he worked as a Space Control Operator in the 16th Space Defense Squadron. Prior to his current assignment, TSgt Kearney held numerous positions in NORAD and U.S. Northern Command on Peterson SFB, Colorado to include Primary Line Instructor, Crew Training Officer, and Non-Commissioned Officer in Charge of the Simulations Cell at Cheyenne Mountain Air Force Station. He has also participated in Red Flag training exercises along with deployments to Iraq and Qatar.

Members of the Order of Missile Defender of the Year

2020

Army
SFC Johnny Washington

Navy
FCA1 John Long

Air Force
Capt Marco Catanese

National Guard
SGM Jason Junkins

Space Operations Command
1st Lt Eryn Daman

2019

Army
CPT Cody Williams

Navy
FCA1 Mario Amaro

Air Force
Capt Nolan Hebein

National Guard
CPT Eric Grant

2018

Army
CW3 Lucas Watterson

Navy
LTJG McKenzie Anderson

Air Force
Capt Rex Villa

National Guard
CW4 Jacob Moore

2017

Army
1LT Benjamin Schiff

Navy
CPO Zachary Quirk

Air Force
Lt Col Rocco Angiolelli

National Guard
CPT Jason Brewer

2016

Army
CW2 Kevin Kruthers

Navy
PO1 Nathaniel Lynch

Air Force
Lt Col Anthony Owens

National Guard
SSG Caroline Domenech



Members of the Order of Missile Defender of the Year

2015

Army

CPT Jason Roberts

Navy

FC1 Elizabeth Clark

Air Force

Maj Michael Sward

National Guard

SSG Trampas Vojtasek

2014

Army

SSG Michael McSherry

Navy

FC2 Bartholomew Ringer

Air Force

Lt Col Jerry Frazier

National Guard

SSG Norman Perkins III

2013

Army

SSG Nancy Wingo

Navy

LT Brandon Bridges

Air Force

Capt Benjamin Szutar

National Guard

SSG Nicholas Power

2012

Army

CPT Kyle Kirkpatrick

Navy

FC2 Ronald Barbee

Air Force

Capt Gregory Tengco

National Guard

SGT Aric Wilkins

2011

Army

CPT Will Andrews

Navy

FC2 Mathieu McIntosh

National Guard

SSG Craig Davis

2010

Army

1LT Ted Kimmey, Jr.

Navy

FC1 (SW) Shawn Walker

Air Force

1st Lt Brian Yoakam

National Guard

MAJ Michael Tobe



A VERY SPECIAL THANK YOU

To the National Guard Bureau, Department of the Army, Department of the Navy,
Department of the Air Force, and United States Space Force.

