

Office of Public Affairs
Main: 907-428-6031
mvapublicaffairs@alaska.gov
PO Box 5800, Camp Denali
Ft Richardson, Alaska 99505-5800



Office of Public Affairs
Main: 907-428-6031
mvapublicaffairs@alaska.gov
PO Box 5800, Camp Denali
Ft Richardson, Alaska 99505-5800

PRESS RELEASE

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

April 2, 2015

By: Staff Sgt. Edward Eagerton

Native Alaskan veteran honored at Doyon award ceremony

JOINT BASE ELMENDORF-RICHARDSON, Alaska — "Doy'eet'daah." In Athabascan, this means, "how are you?"

This is how Staff Sgt. Wanda Solomon, a native of Kaltag, Alaska, and a traffic management office packer with the Alaska Air National Guard's 176th Logistics Readiness Squadron, began her speech when she was presented the Richard Frank Military Award at a ceremony in Fairbanks, March 20.

The award, named after Richard Frank, an Athabascan leader who served in the Army Air Corps during WWII, was created to honor Alaskan Natives who serve in the military.

"I met (him) during 2002," said Solomon. "He was a man of honor, and he carried his military service at the cuff of the sleeve. He served proudly and humbly."

The award was presented to Solomon by Doyon, Limited, one of 13 regional corporations created in 1971 by Congress under the Alaska Native Claims Settlement Act, which serve to manage land and financial claims made by Native Alaskans.

"It is with great honor that I receive this award," Solomon said.

Solomon grew up in the small village of Kaltag, which has a population of just under 200 people, and is located on the Yukon River. Her father, the late William Solomon Sr., retired from the Alaska Army National Guard after 27 years of service. His love of helping people and serving his country influenced her to enlist in the Air National Guard, she explained.

Though she initially joined the Air National Guard in 1997, she later switched to the Army National Guard, serving as a photojournalist. With the AKARNG, she deployed

-more-

in 2005 to Afghanistan in support of Operation Enduring Freedom.

During her speech, she recalled being shot at while trying to take photos and write a story on a convoy in the mountains.

"Fortunately," she said, "the sniper was a bad shot."

She explained that witnessing firsthand the living and social conditions of women and children in Afghanistan had a profound effect on her.

"I remember driving off base, and there would be women holding their infant children, selling boiled eggs to try to make a few dollars," she said. "These kinds of things touch your heart."

After serving in the AKARNG, Solomon switched back to the Air National Guard, with whom she again deployed to Afghanistan in 2012.

Solomon noted that she felt her service could serve as an inspiration to others in her community.

"I joined the military to prove that a woman can set her career goals early on and accomplish it through hard work and dedication," she said. "I want to be a role model to other youth that are undecided about their career choices. If they see the accomplishments of other Alaskan Native peers, they can be inspired to do the same thing."

Solomon noted that service to one's community is not just accomplished in a military uniform. During her speech, she thanked not only her brothers and sisters in the military, but also the state troopers, village public safety officers, city police officers and fire fighters, and all of those who choose public service as their calling.

She explained that she felt humbled to receive this award from both her Native and military communities.

"It is with great pleasure and honor that I thank Doyon Limited, Angela Yatlin of the Rural Cap Program, and the 176th Logistics Readiness Squadron of the Alaska Air National Guard, for recommending me for this award," exclaimed Solomon. "Also, I thank my family and my son for supporting me throughout my career. There are too many people to mention that have influenced my life, both in the Alaska Army and Air National Guard. I humbly accept this award on behalf of all of you."

"Ana'Mas'see," she said.

That means "thank you very much."

###