

Dept. of Military Affairs: Receives national recognition for 115th Fighter Wing chaplain

Posted on Thursday, Apr 21, 2022

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MADISON, Wis. — Lt. Col. Derek Wolter, 115th Fighter Wing chaplain, was awarded the 2021 Samuel Stone Award, which recognizes him as the Chaplain of the Year for the Air National Guard.

The Samuel Stone Award is named after Chaplain Samuel Stone, who was the first recorded chaplain to serve in the militia of colonial America, and is the top honor in the field of military chaplaincy.

“We are extremely happy for the recognition opportunity for Chaplain Wolter based on all of his outstanding work,” said Col. Bart Van Roo, 115th Fighter Wing commander. “His exemplary deployment, and his counsel during a challenging time, will not be forgotten by the fighter wing or myself as a leader.”

Wolter provided spiritual and emotional support to members of the 115th Fighter Wing following the loss of an F-16 fighter jet and its pilot Dec. 8, 2020. He formed deep and meaningful relationships while serving with the Crisis Action Team at home station, as well as at the crash site in northern Michigan. These relationships were crucial in supporting those impacted by the crisis, culminating in a wing-wide remembrance event during the January 2021 drill.

Immediately thereafter, Wolter volunteered and served on a 6-month deployment to Ali Al Salem Air Base, Kuwait, where he served as the head wing chaplain. During his deployment, he created a strong, unified chaplain team, consisting of members from the Air Force, Air Force Reserve and Air National Guard.

“People earn awards, but teams win them,” said Wolter as he accepted his award.

Ordained into ministry in 1989 with the Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod, Wolter earned his commission as a chaplain in the U.S. Air Force Reserve in 1996. He has completed four units of clinical pastoral education, and a one-year fellowship in Palliative and Hospice Care Ministry through the Veterans Administration in St. Louis. He currently serves as the director of spiritual care at Lutheran Home and Harwood Place in Milwaukee.