

Dept. of Military Affairs: Wisconsin Air Guard firefighter earns national honors

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MADISON, Wis. — Whether a civilian or military firefighter, the task to ensure the safety of others isn't always an easy one.

Luckily, for Master Sgt. Colin Pierce, the assistant fire chief of training with the 115th Fire and Emergency Services flight, the job itself happens to be an extremely rewarding one.

“Being a firefighter is one of the best jobs you can have,” Pierce said. “To know that you can help somebody in their worst times and become their hero is truly something special.”

While Pierce's tenure as an active-duty Airman, U.S. Air Force Reservist and now a Wisconsin Air National Guardsman has provided him rewarding experiences, this past year was unique as he was recognized as the 2022 Air National Guard Military Fire Officer of the Year.

“This is honestly the first time I've won an award in the 19 years since I've been in the military,” Pierce said. “I'm not really sure what to think of it as I'm still taking it all in, but I know that I couldn't have done it without all the great guys that have been with me.”

The competition for national awards like this consists of the best noncommissioned officers and senior noncommissioned officers from a work force of approximately 1,800 enlisted personnel in the Air National Guard fire protection career field.

“Pierce went up against the most capable fire and emergency services leaders in

the Air National Guard and was unanimously selected as the winner,” said Chief Master Sgt. Joshua Loescher, the chief of fire and emergency services at the 115th Fighter Wing. “I’ve been with this unit for 20 years and in my experience, this is the first person in the history of the 115th to win this award.”

Since joining the fighter wing in 2020, Pierce’s overall initiative and dedication on many projects is what made him a top contender for the award. For example, he led the Air National Guard fire and emergency services team at the 2022 Civil Engineer Readiness Challenge competition, resulting in a first-place win.

Being the first challenge held in over 10 years, Pierce and his team managed to defeat all other major commands — scoring 180 out of 200 points with no oversight and very little guidance.

“He’s been doing stuff like this since day one,” Loescher said. “If you have a problem, just throw it at him. It doesn’t matter what it is — give him what he needs, and in every situation the problem just goes away.”

With 11 outstanding unit awards, the 115th Fighter Wing is known for its culture of excellence, and it continues to succeed through a whole team effort.

“From the wing commander down to a traditional Guardsman in a 27-person flight, the 115th and the people in it are absolutely the pinnacle of their professions and this is evidence of that,” Loescher said. “It’s the people in every function at every level that make us one of the best units in the Air Force. Being dedicated to excellence is just what we do.”