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ALWAYS READY ALWAYS THERE

FIRST FEMALE ARMOR ENLISTED SOLDIER IN NATION RECEIVES SPIRIT OF FREEDOM AWARD

PHOTO AND STORY BY IDNG PUBLIC AFFAIRS

(GOWEN FIELD)— Sgt. 1st Class Erin Smith of the Idaho Army National Guard was honored with the Spirit of Freedom Award Thursday, August 25, by Sen. Mike Crapo during his recent visit to Gowen Field.

Smith became the first female armor enlisted Soldier in the nation after graduating the U.S. Army's M1 Armor Crewman School, June 25.

During the small ceremony, the senator pointed out that the award was not only for her achievement of becoming the first female armor enlisted Soldier, but for a continued demonstration of sacrifice and dedication to service.

Smith enlisted in the Idaho Army National Guard in 2001 as a healthcare specialist and served on a tour to Bosnia in 2002 with the 183rd Aviation Battalion, headquartered in Boise, Idaho.

She deployed again to Iraq in 2004 with the Idaho National Guard's 116th Brigade Combat Team in support of Operation Iraqi Freedom III.

While serving in Iraq, Smith earned the Combat Medical Badge for her actions of providing medical support while her unit was engaged by the enemy.

"She's standing here beside me, wearing the Combat Medical Badge



Sgt. 1st Class Erin Smith, left, of the Army Idaho National Guard, provides remarks to a crowd of family and Guard members after receiving the Spirit of Freedom Award from Sen. Mike Crapo August 25, 2016, at Gowen Field, Idaho. According to Crapo's office, the Spirit of Freedom Award is reserved for those who have demonstrated the spirit, tenacity and sense of self-sacrifice that are integral to Idaho character. (Photo by Idaho National Guard Public Affairs)

because she's been in combat already," Crapo said. "This is an opportunity for us to give you thanks for blazing the path, for standing up and helping to fight and defend our nation."

According to Crapo's office, the Spirit of Freedom Award is reserved for those who have demonstrated the spirit, tenacity and sense of self-sacrifice that are integral to Idaho character.

Smith, an accomplished Soldier and combat veteran, most recently went shoulder-to-shoulder with her male peers through the technically and physically demanding "19

Kilo" Army Military Occupational Skill curriculum, administered by the 1st of the 204th Regional Training Institute's Armor Training Battalion located in Boise, Idaho. An M1 armor crewman is responsible for operating armored equipment such as the M1A1 and M1A2 Abrams tanks in maneuvering against and destroying enemy targets.

Sen. Crapo concluded his presentation to Smith by acknowledging her as a model Soldier, "For being an example of one of so many who are standing right here in this room, willing to put their lives and their bodies on the line to defend our freedom in this country," Crapo said.

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Sgt. 1st Class Erin Smith, left, of the Idaho Army National Guard, listens as Sen. Mike Crapo honors her for her achievements at a presentation of the Spirit of Freedom Award August 25, 2016, at Gowen Field, Idaho. Brig. Gen. John Goodale, commander of the Idaho Army National Guard and Brig. Gen. Robert Lytle, right, Land Component commander, were both on hand to congratulate Smith. (Photo by Idaho National Guard Public Affairs)



Until recently, females have historically been prohibited from serving in combat roles within the various branches of the U.S. Armed Forces. However, in December of 2015, Defense Secretary Ash Carter announced that the U.S. military would open all positions to women, without exception. This means those occupational skills previously off limits to females, like infantry and armor, are now open to both women and men who can meet the standards set by the different military services.

“Thank you to the schoolhouse for allowing me to attend and for

being so professional and also being the first,” Smith said. “If it wasn’t for the schoolhouse wanting to do that, for wanting to pave the way, for wanting to be the first, none of us could’ve done it.”

As the first female enlisted 19K M1 Armor Crewman School graduate in the nation, Smith will serve as a mentor and leader of future female enlisted combat professionals in the Idaho Army National Guard.

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