

# MARTINSVILLE BULLETIN

## Sharpe given flag that flew over Capitol in her honor

Army major's service to country commended

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By PAUL COLLINS - Bulletin Staff Writer

Army Maj. Sherri Sharpe was honored recently for defending the United States and protecting Americans' freedoms, while helping the citizens of Afghanistan and Iraq.

Sharpe, who grew up in Martinsville, was given an American flag that flew in her honor over the U.S. Capitol on Dec. 2 at the request of 5th District U.S. Rep. Tom Perriello.

"I'm overwhelmed. I'm honored," Sharpe responded Wednesday, as her parents watched the ceremony at Perriello's office uptown. Kimble Reynolds Jr., regional director for Perriello, read a letter from Perriello, who was unable to attend.



Major Sherri Sharpe (second from right) is shown at the flag presentation with (from left) Kimble Reynolds and Martha Woody from the office of 5th District U.S. Rep. Tom Perriello, and Sharpe's parents, Pat Handy and Doug Sharpe.

The letter says, in part: "A few weeks ago, my office was contacted by (retired Army) Lt. Col. David King, who notified me of your upcoming redeployment. I wanted to present you this flag as a symbol of your patriotism. We are all humbled by your selfless act of sacrifice to defend our country and protect our freedoms, while coming to the aid of the citizens of Afghanistan and Iraq.

"Through your past service at Martinsville High School and Mary Baldwin College and your current service at Virginia Military Institute, you have become an inspiration to our community. I am certain that you will make your family and country proud during your time overseas flying Chinook helicopters. While we know that you will make an important difference there, we are all eagerly awaiting your safe return home."

Sharpe will be redeployed to Iraq in October, and she called that part of her job. She has been in the United States since 2007, and during that time, some soldiers have had two tours of duty.

"It's my time to go again," she said. "I believe in what we do there," Sharpe said, adding that she has seen positive results. This will be her fourth tour of duty and her third to Iraq. She also did a tour in Afghanistan, she said.

Sharpe graduated from Martinsville High School in 1995 and graduated in the first class of Virginia Women's Institute for Leadership (VWIL) at Mary Baldwin College in 1999. VWIL is the only all-female corps of cadets in the world, according to Mary Baldwin's Web site and

Sharpe, who is on the board of trustees at Mary Baldwin.

Among the highlights of Sharpe's 10 1/2-year military career thus far are:

- Serving as a platoon leader in Afghanistan, predominantly stationed at Bagram Air Field, in 2002. She remembers the first day little girls were allowed to go to school because it had been illegal under the Taliban, and she remembers American soldiers handing school supplies to boys and girls. According to Internet reports, many schools had been closed for years because of civil war and political unrest.
- Serving as a platoon leader in Iraq in 2003, moving several places while providing air support for the U.S.-led ground invasion of Iraq and finishing in Balad. She remembers flying "hero missions" in which KIAs (those killed in action) were flown to Kuwait so they could be transported back to the United States. She said it was a meaningful mission. "We were taking care of our own," she said. She also remembers flying a man who had been exiled from Iraq for 18 years back to his homeland. He didn't know whether his family was alive or dead but was grateful to be able to find out. And there were others like him, she said.
- Serving as company commander in Taji, Iraq, in 2006, in which she said her main responsibility was to bring all the soldiers in her command home alive. Everyone under her leadership did make it back alive in all three of her tours, she said. She led about 65 soldiers as a platoon leader in her first tour in Iraq, about 65 in her tour in Afghanistan and 83 as a company commander in her second tour in Iraq.
- Flying Chinook CH 47 helicopters, the largest the Army uses, for most of her career.
- Serving as an assistant professor of military science at Virginia Military Institute from December 2007 to December 2009.

Among the military awards she has received are two air medals, a Bronze Star, a meritorious service award, three Army commendations, an Army achievement award and others. This week, Sharpe said, she will go to Fort Rucker, Ala., to be executive officer (second in charge) of the First 1-58 Airfield Operations Battalion (AOB). She is scheduled to be deployed to Iraq in October as an executive officer. In that position, she will be a detachment commander, which means she will command some personnel from Fort Rucker and some from other units, she said.

Sharpe and her parents said they plan to enjoy the time they have together during the holidays. She said the time together is special because she won't be home in Christmas 2010. So "you have to make memories" now that will last while she's on her tour in Iraq, she said. That tour could last six months to a year, she said.

Sharpe's mother, Pat Handy of Martinsville, said that after years of not being home for Christmas, this was the second year Sharpe was able to be home. "You know moms; we tend to worry about them," Handy said, adding that she is happy about their time together. Sharpe's stepfather is Phil Handy. Her brother, Steven Sharpe, lives in Danville, and her stepbrother, Tom Handy, lives in Martinsville.

Sharpe's father, Doug Sharpe, said he also was enjoying Sherri being home for Christmas. Doug Sharpe and his wife, Shirley, live in Martinsville.

Both Pat Handy and Doug Sharpe said they are proud of their daughter and her service. Handy said she appreciates the recognition her daughter received and King for nominating her.

Doug Sharpe said of his daughter's upcoming redeployment: "She chose the military. That's her job."

He said he trusts she will return safely, adding, "I want her back in one piece."