

# Air Force Captain honored for outstanding work

By **TAMARIA L. KULEMEKA** The Eagle-Gazette Staff

LANCASTER - Ed Snyder and his son, Jason, once had a disagreement on Veterans Day. Ed told Jason he wasn't a veteran since he had never been in a war zone.

"I said something like, 'Well you're not a veteran yet,' " Ed Snyder said as he recalled the conversation with his son. "Now he's been a veteran four times."

Capt. Jason Snyder is on his third tour of duty in Iraq. Jason, a combat search and rescue pilot, also served in Afghanistan.

The Air Rescue Association recently awarded Jason the Richard T. Kight award, which is given to an outstanding airman selected by his or her superiors, said Marilyn Nicholas, association spokeswoman.

This is the second consecutive year someone from Moody Air Force Base, Valdosta, Ga. - where Jason is stationed - has received the honor.

"There's a lot of history behind the ARA, and when I read about past winners I felt humbled by being associated with them," Jason wrote in an e-mail to the Lancaster Eagle-Gazette.

Jason, who is expected to return home soon to his wife in Georgia, was unable to attend the awards banquet because of his deployment. But his parents, Ed and Kathy, attended the ceremony.

The Snyders had knowledge of the kind of work their son does, but they didn't know to what extent. They were in awe as they listened to the description of their son's missions and why he was selected for the honor.

"It kind of put a lump in your throat," Kathy said. "You're thinking, we're at home and things are OK. And you don't know at that moment whether he's out picking someone up or getting shot at."

Putting his life on the line Jason was commissioned as an officer in the Air Force in May 1998 through the ROTC program at Bowling Green State University.

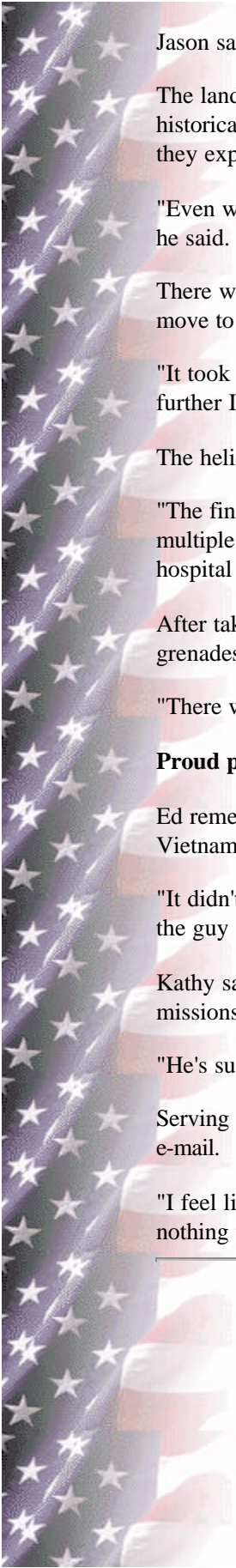
Ed and Kathy didn't know their son was interested in being an Air Force pilot until his sophomore year of college. He called them one day and announced he was switching colleges.

"He said that's what he always wanted to do," said Ed, who served in the U.S. Army during the Vietnam war.

Jason, the oldest of four children, has flown 952 missions, 164 of which were combat missions during his career in the Air Force.

Jason recounted in the e-mail that his most dangerous mission was in Afghanistan. His crew responded to a medical evacuation where a Humvee hit an Improvised Explosive Device.

"When we stepped out the door, the initial reports were for anywhere from three to 15 casualties, severe burns and broken bones, and of multiple IED attacks, not just the one." Jason wrote. "It was in the middle of the night, and there was no moon that night, which means flying on night vision goggles in the mountains."



Jason said it was extremely dark and they were unable to see even with the goggles.

The landing zone where Jason was to land his helicopter was at the bottom of a steep valley next to a historically high-threat village. Jason said the slope in the landing zone turned out to be steeper than they expected.

"Even with full brakes applied, we were skidding across the mountain floor toward the ground team," he said.

There was zero visibility and the helicopter had to take back off. The team on the ground had to move to a new landing zone, which was just down the hill from the initial landing zone.

"It took the team awhile to move to a new landing zone, I assume because they were sweeping for further IEDs while they moved," Jason said.

The helicopter landed at the new landing zone without incident, he wrote.

"The final count on casualties was eight," he wrote. "We decided to load all eight at one time to avoid multiple return trips to the area, to avoid multiple trips over the village, and to get all eight to the hospital as soon as possible."

After taking off, Jason wrote, the team on the ground called out that multiple rocket-propelled grenades were being shot at the helicopter.

"There was no incident from the threats, and we made it safely to the hospital," he wrote.

### **Proud parents**

Ed remembers guys, like his son, who would take away the wounded during fire fights during Vietnam. He served two years in the U.S. Army.

"It didn't hit home for me until I heard them read the (award) citation," Ed said. "I thought, 'Oh, he's the guy that comes in and takes our wounded away.' "

Kathy said she was really surprised when her son told her he wanted to do search and rescue missions. But then again, she said, the work he does fits his personality.

"He's such a gentle person, and he's not out there fighting," she said. "He's rescuing."

Serving in the military is about being a part of something bigger than himself, Jason explained in his e-mail.

"I feel like I've made a difference, especially to the rescue community," he wrote. "To me, there's nothing that compares to a team putting their lives on the line to save a fallen brother."

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Questions or comments regarding this web site should be sent to [Sandy Gonzalez](#).

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