

Individual Augmentees Honored At NAS Jacksonville

(NAVY NEWS SERVICE 21 NOV 11) ... Kaylee LaRocque, Naval Air Station Jacksonville Public Affairs

JACKSONVILLE, Fla. -- Naval Air Station Jacksonville (NAS Jax) and the Northeast Florida Navy League Council hosted their eighth semi-annual Individual Augmentee (IA) Appreciation luncheon Nov. 17 at the NAS Jax Officers' Club.

One-hundred and fifteen IAs from the base and tenant commands and several spouses were recognized at the event.

The luncheon kicked off with the singing of the national anthem by Kela Stelig and the invocation by NAS Jax Command Chaplain Lt. Cmdr. Shannon Skidmore. NAS Jax Commanding Officer Capt. Jeffrey Maclay gave the opening remarks.

"We are here today to honor your commitment and service. The Navy asks you to go and support a sister service into an area to do the nation's bidding unaccompanied by a squadron or command. You complete your deployments with dignity and come back home and then go right back to work and on with your lives. I cannot say 'thank-you' enough for what you do," said Maclay.

Commander, Navy Region Southeast Rear Adm. Jack Scorby Jr. was the guest speaker for the event. "You are the heroes who stepped up to the plate when the Navy needed you to serve. IA deployments are undoubtedly some of the most difficult, but you and your families willingly made that sacrifice. You are doing more than a job, you are protecting our freedoms and we are grateful for that.

"Since 9/11, 95,000 Sailors have served as IAs and at any given time we have more than 200 IAs deployed from NAS Jacksonville. What amazes me is the depth of these assignments - commanding provincial reconnaissance teams in Afghanistan, guarding prisoners in Guantanamo Bay, tending to the wounded in Afghanistan and Landstuhl, manning convoys in Iraq and Afghanistan, support Joint Task Force Horn of Africa missions in Djibouti, and conducting operations in Columbia and Honduras. Thank you for devoting up to a year of your life for this critical duty."

Scorby also thanked the spouses in attendance. "You are the unsung heroes holding down the homefront and taking care of everything else so our Sailors can do their jobs," he said.

As part of the ongoing tradition during the IA luncheon, one of the IAs being recognized discusses his or her experiences while on deployment. Aviation Boatswain's Mate (Handling) 2nd Class (AW/SW) Nnamdi Emenogu of the NAS Jax Air Operations Department offered his perspective of the IA warrior.

"It is my pleasure and an honor to stand here amongst my fellow IA Sea - Sand Warriors and Sailors, to address you today. I completed my IA tour May 2, 2011 and can honestly say that it's been the most challenging deployment of my nine years in the Navy. The orders were supposed to be for a travel clerk position with the Warrior Transition Program in Camp Arifjan, Kuwait. When I arrived, they were short of gunner's mates so I ended up inspecting, inventorying, and shipping back over 900 rifles and handguns each week to the States," he said.

"I finally took over as the travel leading petty officer, responsible for managing and coordinating logistics and flight reservations for redeploying Sailors. I was also in charge of the weekly rotator flight. The days were long, the work was stressful but at the end, nothing made me any happier than sending the Sailors and Soldiers home alive to reunite with loved ones," continued Emenogu.

"While serving on my IA tour, I developed a far deeper appreciation for my fellow Sailors and service members who left all behind to do their duty. These folks stood by me when times were tough. One of my saddest times came when I had to type a Red Cross message while looking into the eyes of a Sailor going home to bury his brother," Emenogu said.

"My experience working with the other branches of the service bestowed great pride in me even though the Soldiers called me 'sergeant.' I realized that the capability of a United States Sailor is only limited by their imagination. We are truly special in all aspects and are equipped with the skills to make things happen. We should all be filled with a sense of pride knowing that we directly contributed to making this world a safer place."

After lunch, each IA was presented with a special plaque and coin from the Northeast Florida Navy League Council and thank-you letters from U.S. Sens. Bill Nelson and Marco Rubio, and U.S. Congressman Ander Crenshaw. Each spouse was also presented with a letter of appreciation and a rose.

"This is a very classy event and I'm very honored to be here today. It's great that the base and Navy League are recognizing those of us who served as IAs with units overseas," said Religious Program Specialist 3rd Class Chester Harden of Commander, Patrol and Reconnaissance Wing 11 who was deployed as an IA to Baghdad, Iraq for 12 months.