

## NAVAIR lieutenant commander presented with French medal

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French Air Force Brig. Gen. Bruno Caïtucoli, defense attaché, pins U.S. Navy Lt. Cmdr. Kyle Caldwell with the Afghanistan Commemorative Medal during the French embassy's annual joint forces conference Oct. 4 in Washington, D.C.

NAVAL AIR SYSTEMS COMMAND, PATUXENT RIVER, Md. - Lt. Cmdr. Kyle Caldwell was honored for his service aboard a French aircraft carrier by the French military during a ceremony Oct. 4 at its embassy in Washington, D.C.

French Air Force Brig. Gen. Bruno Caïtucoli, defense attaché, presented Caldwell with the Afghanistan Commemorative Medal for his exchange liaison officer duties while stationed aboard the French aircraft carrier, Charles de Gaulle (R91) from February 2009 to September 2011. During this time, he participated in a four-month deployment to Afghanistan in support of Operation Agapanthe.

"I am very excited to receive this award," said Caldwell, who currently serves as Aircraft Launch and Recovery Equipment maintenance program team lead for the Naval Air Systems Command ALRE Program Office (PMA-251) at NAS Patuxent River. "My tour in France was a phenomenal experience. It was a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity and I wouldn't trade it for the world."

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He served many roles while on the Charles de Gaulle, to include consultant among the French navy, the U.S. Navy's ALRE program and U.S. Naval Supply Systems Command. Caldwell also served as an inspector, performing daily equipment evaluations, and as logistics liaison, ALRE maintenance technician and trainer, and aircraft shooter.

"The French bought their catapult and arresting gear from [the United States]," Caldwell said, "so I used my previous experiences as an ALRE maintenance officer on a U.S. carrier to monitor the systems and provide technical knowledge and corrective maintenance techniques when needed."

During his tour, Caldwell also participated in Operation Harmattan, a 13-day aerial campaign over Libya in March 2011.

As the fifth U.S. Navy officer to be stationed on the Charles de Gaulle, Caldwell considers himself fortunate. "It was just being at the right place at the right time," he said. "If I was not a catapult and arresting gear specialist, I wouldn't have been chosen for the job."

He said learning the language was his biggest hurdle since he didn't speak French prior to the tour.

"After being there about a year, I was able to say what I wanted to in French, but I still had challenges understanding when it was spoken," he said. "When you're on a French ship, it's a melting pot of so many different dialects on one ship. So not only was I put to the task of learning a new language, but I had to learn different forms of the language."

Caldwell said learning French has benefited him greatly in his current role at PMA-251 as he's been asked to translate during several meetings with the U.S. and French navies.

"Caldwell came to the program office with a wealth of ALRE knowledge and ship experience but we didn't realize how much we'd utilize the skills he'd gained onboard the Charles de Gaulle," said Cmdr. Tony Hernandez, ALRE Fleet Liaison officer at PMA-251. "His professionalism and work ethic, no doubt, left a great impression on our French teammates."