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News Release

Lemoore native wins Service member of the year

BETHESDA, Md., -- A Lemoore, Calif., native at the Uniformed Services University of the Health Sciences here recently earned the coveted Service Member of the Year and Soldier of the Year awards for 2002.

Army Sgt. Elizabeth Van Der Molen, daughter of Susan and Garry Van Der Molen, an active duty Navy master chief petty officer, competed against the Sailor and Airman of the Year for the service member of the year award. She also competed against three other soldiers for the Soldier of the Year award. USU Brigade Commander, Army Col. Charles Serio presented both awards to her on Feb. 14.

Van Der Molen is an animal care specialist in USU's Veterinary Medicine Division. She is responsible for maintaining inventory, ordering drugs and supervising procedures for the animal health surveillance program for more than 13,000 rodents used in research and training protocols. She also assists her division in veterinary care and administration support of 14 different animal species in support of the training and research missions of 800 medical and nursing students, doctors and nurses.

"I am not going to lie, I really wanted to be service member of the year," said Van Der Molen. "My dad is my hero, and he thinks highly of military accomplishments. I wanted to show

my dad that I could do it. No one back home thought that I would make it in the Army. I also wanted to prove them wrong.”

For the Service Member of the Year award, the university’s Soldier, Sailor and Airman of the Year compete against each other by answering questions from a board of Air Force and Army senior NCOs and senior Navy petty officers. Board members ask each service member questions on topics such as current events, chain-of-command, the Uniformed Code of Military Justice and Air Force, Navy and Army general, service-specific questions. The board also evaluates each service member’s written nomination package, which includes information about their leadership qualities, job performance and self-improvement.

The four Soldier of the Quarter winners compete for Soldier of the Year. A board of Army senior NCOs evaluate each quarterly award winner, who must be an E-6 or below. Board members ask each soldier questions, which are similar to the service member of the year board with the exception of Navy and Air Force general, service-specific questions. The board also reviews each soldier’s written nomination package. Each soldier receives points for the number of questions they answer correctly, and their military bearing in meeting the board.

“During the Soldier of the Year board, I thought the competition was tough. The soldiers I competed against are extremely competent in their fields,” said Van Der Molen. She graduated from Lemoore High School in 1999 before joining the Army in July 1999. In her spare time, Van Der Molen enjoys spending time with her fiancé, roller blading, mountain hiking, bicycling and swimming. She also enjoys sewing and cross ditching. Her plans for the future include getting married and becoming an elementary school teacher.

USU was established by Congress under the Department of Defense in 1972 and has the nation’s only fully accredited federal school of medicine and graduate school of nursing. With its

motto “Learning to Care for Those in Harm’s Way,” the university has a worldwide reputation as a center of excellence for military medical education and research.