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## Air Force honors Ogden woman

### Reservist Luann Van Peursesem aided pair hurt in rocket attack

[Greg Livadas](#)  
Staff writer

In her 30 years as an Air Force reservist, Luann Van Peursesem has been deployed to Nevada, Germany and Afghanistan.

In February, the Ogden resident was sent to Iraq for a six-month mission with the 914th Airlift Wing, whose home is the Niagara Falls Air Force Base.

"This has been her most nerve-wracking deployment," said her husband, Pete Van Peursesem.

While Luann Van Peursesem's duties are usually in a support role — she's based at Sather Air Base in Baghdad, where she helps coordinate transportation, cargo and troop support — the reality of the war hit close on June 20. An enemy rocket landed outside her office, critically wounding two friends who are also based in Niagara Falls.

Van Peursesem, 53, who worked for years in Rochester as an EMT and paramedic, rushed towards their cries and offered aid before medics could arrive. She helped control bleeding to one victim's chest and thigh, moved one of the men to a bunker for protection and repositioned him to help him breathe.

The men were flown to Germany to recover.

On Thursday, Van Peursesem was presented the Air Force Commendation Medal with Valor from Brig. Gen. Burton Field, 332nd Air Expeditionary Wing commander, for her actions.

Van Peursesem worked for Monroe Ambulance for more than 20 years, but left a few years ago due to a neck injury. She was working as a stress-test technician at University Cardiovascular Associates in Brighton when she was deployed.

Her husband said she has always enjoyed helping others.

"When you're a medic and you have a good call, there's a real rush of adrenaline," he said. "It's kind of a rush."

But Luann's voice was different when she called Pete after the attack.

"She called me the next day and said, 'In case you see it in the paper, I'm OK,'" he said. "I knew right away something was wrong because she never gets frazzled. I could tell something wasn't right."

He said his wife was in an office when the rocket hit. The outside of her office was heavily damaged by shrapnel.

"What if she wasn't in the office? What if she got hurt?" Pete Van Peursesem said. "I wasn't worried about her until I got that first phone call three weeks ago. Nothing's safe over there."

Despite the close call, he predicts this won't end his wife's military career.

"This will make her stronger," he said. "She won't retire until she has to retire, as long as she's healthy and she can serve."

Pete, a production worker at High Falls Brewery, and Luann have two children, both of whom were inspired by their mother's military service.

Philip, 25, joined the Air Force Reserve on Sept. 9, 2001, two days before the terrorist attacks in New York and Washington. He's now in the Air Force's para-rescuing school in the Southwest.

Kyle, 22, is studying meteorology at the University of Utah in Salt Lake City. He's also a member of the Air Force ROTC.

"Next May, he'll be commissioned as a second lieutenant in the Air Force," Pete Van Peursesem said. "She'll have 30 years in and he'll outrank her. She'll have to salute him, but she'll do so proudly."

[GLIVADAS@DemocratandChronicle.com](mailto:GLIVADAS@DemocratandChronicle.com)

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