



NRO Airman Awarded Prestigious Military Service Award Leads Awareness Campaign, Aids Others While Fighting Cancer Battle

By Tom Knowles, NRO Office of Public Affairs
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WASHINGTON, D.C. – Tech. Sgt. Carmen Washington, the Non-Commissioned Officer in Charge of the NRO Operations Squadron, received the 2017 Latina Style Distinguished Military Service Award, on Sept 15, 2017, in Washington D.C.



Retired U.S. Navy Cmdr. Everett Alvarez Jr. (left), the longest-held Prisoner of War in American Military History, U.S. Air Force Tech. Sgt. Carmen Washington, (center) non-commissioned officer in charge of the NRO Operations Squadron, and U.S. Air Force Col. Matthew Skeen, NRO Office of Space Launch director, stand together as Washington receives her Latina Style Distinguished Military Service Award at the National LATINA Symposium. (Courtesy photo)

Presented annually at the National LATINA Symposium, the award recognizes the exemplary service of women in the military and DoD workforce that have enhanced the role of Latinas throughout the Armed Forces. Sergeant Washington was one of only 16 Distinguished DoD recipients, representing all branches of the United States Armed Forces, recognized at the event. The 10-year Air Force veteran received the award in recognition of her inspirational achievements launching a national breast health and cancer awareness campaign while fighting her own battle with the disease.

“Carmen’s story is really impressive,” said Lt Col. Eric Doctor, Director of Operations for her NRO Operations Squadron. “She not only fought and beat the disease, but also turned

her struggle into an effort to ensure others either did not have to face that challenge or are better prepared for the struggle.”

While her bravery and fighting spirit are exemplary and an inspiration, Washington accomplished much more following her diagnosis with stage-three breast cancer. In addition to enduring extensive chemotherapy, radiation treatment and reconstructive surgery, she launched a campaign to end the disease, providing hope, education and inspiration to countless individuals and communities throughout the nation.

"I am very grateful and blessed to be one of the 2017 Latina Style Distinguished Military Service Award recipients," said Washington. "I am also extremely honored to have the opportunity to represent the United States Air Force, the Latinas in the Department of Defense, and the Hispanic Community."

Washington's notable achievements included service as a patient advocate to new cancer patients, media interviews and public speaking appearances to share her cancer story, a public service announcement video demonstrating chemotherapy procedures for new patients and fundraising efforts resulting in more than \$13,000 for cancer research studies and local medical services. Washington credits her parents for instilling an unbreakable work ethic and perseverance in the face of insurmountable odds.

"This award is very special to me because it's a reminder of where I come from and how hard my family and I have worked to get to where we are," said Washington. "My parents are immigrants from Mexico and they came to the United States in search of the American Dream."

Sergeant Washington also praised her squadron leadership for their incredible encouragement and assistance supporting her professional and personal growth, while overcoming the adversity of battling cancer as a young single parent.

"I am blessed to have servant leadership in my chain of command that put their people first and take care of them 24/7," said Washington. "They have always been very supportive. They motivated me to earn my Bachelor's Degree and earn the rank of Technical Sergeant. We need more leaders like my leadership because when you take care of your people, on and off-duty, they will be loyal to you and take care of the mission no matter what."

Twenty-seven months following her initial diagnosis, Washington is cancer-free and continues to help others. Most recently, she was selected to share her story with the Air Force Chief of Staff and other top-ranking leaders to shape the Air Force Wounded Warrior Program (AFW2) strategy, a Congressionally-mandated program that provides personalized care, services and advocacy to wounded, ill or injured Recovering Service Members. Sergeant Washington also serves as an AFW2 Ambassador and Mentor, supporting engagements with Air Force and community leaders to advocate on behalf of DoD wounded personnel.

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