

Governor meets with Airman of the Year recipient

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SPRINGFIELD - Staff Sgt. Ethan Wheeler of Trenton, Illinois assigned to the 126th Operations Support Squadron, was selected to receive the U.S. Air National Guard's

Staff Sergeant Henry "Red" Erwin Outstanding Enlisted Aircrew Member of the Year Award. Illinois Governor Bruce Rauner met with Wheeler in his office Jan. 11 to honor Wheeler for being selected.

Rauner shook hands with Wheeler and presented him with a congratulatory letter.

"The leaders of this organization couldn't be more proud of Wheeler," said Maj. Gen. Richard J. Hayes Jr., the Adjutant General of the Illinois National Guard. "He set the example for Airmen throughout the force with his accomplishments this year and I know he will continue to do great things."

The annual award recognizes enlisted aircrew members for their outstanding accomplishments, leadership and self-improvement in support of the enlisted aircrew operations field.

During the time period covered for the award, Wheeler deployed to Southwest Asia where he completed 61 combat aerial refueling missions and encountered five in-flight emergencies involving coalition fighter aircraft and his own KC-135 Stratotanker. While in theater, he also flew over 670 operational and training hours to accrue the most hours of any enlisted aircrew member in his deployed wing at that time.