

Kiowa pilot one of two sisters in Afghanistan

Third Sister to Deploy to Afghanistan

Army Times Staff report

Posted : Wednesday Jul 30, 2008 20:49:08 EDT

Flying is a family tradition for the two sisters from White Salmon, Wash., who found themselves assigned to Afghanistan at the same time as pilots.

Air Force Capt. Kelly Smith, a C-130 Hercules pilot with the 146th Airlift Wing in Channel Islands, Calif., and *Army Chief Warrant Officer Amber Smith*, an OH-58 Kiowa Warrior pilot with the 101st Airborne Division out of Fort Campbell, Ky., often crossed paths earlier this year in Afghanistan.

"We have two completely different missions, but we both take care of the ground troops," Kelly Smith, 31, said in an Air Force release. "The C-130s do a lot of airdrops, and it's fulfilling because you are getting the beans and bullets to the guys on the ground."

Amber Smith, the younger sister by five years, agreed.

"I love [the Kiowa] mission because we work in direct support of the ground units," she explained. "It's awesome to help them because they are the ones with boots on the ground."

Their grandfather flew in the Army Air Corps as a lieutenant colonel during World War II and a commercial pilot after that. Their grandmother and mother were flight attendants. Multiple others in the family became commercial pilots, including their father, uncle and a few cousins.

Their father had encouraged them to look into the military for flying opportunities. Kelly Smith jumped first, enlisting in the California Air National Guard shortly after the terrorist attacks on Sept. 11.

"[Sept. 11] hit me pretty hard because I had been planning on going to the airlines and interviewing that December," she said. "I'll never forget looking up with all my friends and seeing all our flights cancelled. It was almost like seeing my career go up in smoke."

After graduating from enlisted basic training, Kelly Smith was selected for the pilot board, got her commission and became a C-130 pilot for the 146th Airlift Wing in Channel Islands.

"I always liked the C-130s," she said. "I happened to meet this girl whose father is one of the colonels in our unit. He introduced me to everyone in the unit and I got to see all the planes. I thought it was really cool — I decided that was what I wanted to do. I had discovered something that I was really excited in."

In 2003, Amber Smith, knowing that she wanted to fly, enlisted in the Army. She chose her aircraft, the OH-58 Kiowa Warrior, almost by chance.

"I think you should pick an aircraft based on the mission, but I didn't really know much about any of the missions," she said. "I actually liked flying the TS-57 [in Army flight school] and thought helicopters would be similar — little did I know. I ended up getting Kiowa, which was probably the best thing that could have ever happened to me. I'm really glad I got it — it has an awesome mission."

Fully qualified on the Kiowa, Amber Smith was stationed with the 101st Airborne Division out of Fort Campbell, Ky.

In late 2007, her unit deployed to Forward Operating Base Jalalabad, Afghanistan. Not long after deploying, Amber Smith began to receive e-mails from her sister, Kelly Smith — whose unit would be deploying to Bagram Airfield. They would be in different services, different locations, assigned to different units, but they found a commonality in their mission in Afghanistan — aiding troops on the ground.

The two Smith sisters aren't the only pilots their parents worry about. Younger sister *Lacey Smith, 25, is an Army chief warrant officer* and flies the UH-60 Black Hawk. Her unit, A Company, 101st Aviation, replaces Chief Amber Smith's unit this winter.

Amber Smith said she expects a few weeks of overlap with Lacey Smith, just as she has with Kelly Smith. This will be Lacey Smith's first deployment.

“Amber and Kelly have given me great info about what all the different places are like,” Lacey Smith said. “I am really looking forward to our upcoming deployment.”

Like her sisters, Lacey Smith looks forward to supporting the troops on the ground — and the flying.

“I chose Black Hawks because of their mission diversity,” she said. “I’m not one for shooting things up, but love to have guys like Amber buzzing around us. Plus, I love being able to meet and help soldiers.”



Air Force Capt. Kelly Smith and Army CW2 Amber Smith



Air Force Capt. Kelly Smith



Army CW2 Amber Smith



Army CW2 Lacey Smith