



SSG Kenneth Merritt and SSG Jason Burnett (left to right) received a Joint Service Achievement Medal for actions during Operations Enduring Freedom IX and became the first Division-level Space support NCOs to earn the U.S. Air Force Space Badge. *Courtesy Photo*

# EAGLE SPACE NCOs

By MAJ Andrew D. Hittner, USA, CJTF-101 Knowledge Management Officer

On Sept. 11, 2008, the 101st Airborne Division (Air Assault) presented the first two division-level Non-Commissioned Officers with the United States Air Force Space Badge. The ceremony occurred at the Joint Operations Center for Combined Joint Task Force-101, Bagram, Afghanistan and represented the evolving mission of the 101st Space Support Element and Army Space forces.

Staff Sergeants Kenneth Merritt and Jason Burnett were Screaming Eagles for two combat deployments, both times supporting the 101st Space Support Element (CJ3 Space and Special Technical Operations). They saw divisional Space support change from the Operation Iraqi Freedom IV, where their mission was to operate and maintain the Space Application Technology User Reach back Node (SATURN) and Space Operations Systems. Now both Soldiers support the mission in Afghanistan for Operation Enduring Freedom IX. In order to keep up with the growing demand of Space technology proficiency, both SSG Merritt and SSG Burnett completed numerous Space courses, and dedicated themselves to expanding their education beyond the basic duty requirements within their Military Occupational Speciality. SSG Merritt's previous Army experiences as an artilleryman and SSG Burnett's infantry background enhanced their application of new and emerging Space technologies to meet warfighting needs. While in Iraq they became proficient in imagery acquisition utilizing national and commercial imagery. Here in Afghanistan, they merged their previous training with new efforts to support the Afghanistan Space Operations Center, which utilizes USASMDC, NRO and

Special Operations Command systems. They currently assist Joint Personnel Recovery Cell efforts, disseminate Overhead Non-Imaging Infrared data and monitor world-wide Theater Ballistic Missile/Space launch activity while conducting daily analysis for the joint staff. With eight combined years of experience in Army Space, both SSG Merritt and SSG Burnett have proven their dedication to the Army Space mission and represent its progression as an indispensable facet to the U. S. Army's warfighting capabilities.



LTC Patrick J Mullin speaks to his CJTF-101 Space and Special Technical Operations Soldiers and audience during a 2008 Operation Enduring Freedom award ceremony, Sept. 11. All members were awarded the Joint Service Achievement Medal and SSG Kenneth Merritt, SSG Jason Burnett and MAJ Christopher Oxendine received the U.S. Air Force Space Badge. Pictured left to right - MAJ Andrew Hittner, MAJ Christopher Oxendine, CPT Michael Bancroft, SSG Kenneth Merritt, SSG Jason Burnett and SGT Jose Ibarra. *Courtesy Photo*