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University of Kentucky Surgeon Balances Civilian, Military Careers

Balancing a demanding career as University of Kentucky's chief of general thoracic surgery with an Army obligation hasn't always been easy. But Dr. Timothy Mullett has been successful on both fronts. Mullett, a cardiothoracic surgeon and a colonel in the U.S. Army Reserve, recently returned to Lexington after being deployed to Afghanistan. The military deployment was his second during the Global War on Terror, with his first to Iraq in 2004. "I've had opportunities to deploy -- and that hasn't been an onerous task for me," Mullett said, noting that open communication with his civilian and military superiors has been key to his achievements. "The Army Reserve has been very accommodating with regard to my civilian career."

Over the years, Mullett has been able to focus his efforts where they were needed most. For more than a decade, that meant leading the university's heart and lung transplant program. At other times it involved advancing his military career by participating in training events. More recently, his attention turned to manning a Forward Surgical Team (FST) in a warzone.

Physicians and surgeons in the Army Reserve generally serve one weekend each month and approximately two weeks every year. They may be called upon for deployments as the need arises; however, those deployments are generally much shorter in duration than those of the average soldier. Mullett's most recent tour to Afghanistan was 90 days, boots on ground. While he was in Afghanistan, Mullett said he was not as busy as he is in his civilian practice. In a warzone, that's a good problem to have. Mullett said it took "prayerful contemplation" to comprehend the importance of his role. "What I came to understand is that the soldiers who were going outside the wire took confidence in the fact that we would be here for them if something happened."

Thoracic surgery is one of more than 100 medical specialties represented in the Army. Mullett is one of the few Army surgeons who holds this specific skill or "area of concentration" as the



Army refers to officer positions. “In a way, I’m kind of an anomaly,” Mullett said. “There are just not a lot of thoracic surgeons in the Army.”

But the Army is looking for more. This year, Army medical recruiters throughout the country are charged with finding five thoracic surgeons who are willing to serve. It’s a kind of a needle-in-the-haystack recruiting mission that may be difficult to achieve, but their service is vital to the life-saving mission of Army Medicine.

“Historically, cardiothoracic surgery is a busy practice in areas of great need,” Mullett said. “You’re talking about high performing personnel who are well paid and have what they consider a busy practice. For better or for worse, many may feel they are more valuable in that practice than in doing something else.”

Although deployment is the most visible evidence of military service, Mullett said the Army can allow thoracic surgeons to explore other areas of medicine, to include teaching or administration that may not be available in their current practice. “The Army has allowed me to expand my abilities by learning new skills and teaching others,” Mullett said. “The chance to experience deployment opportunities is only a part of developing my Army career.”

Army medical recruiters know that money is not the only motivating factor for physicians and surgeons who join the Army. “For some it’s a sense of duty, for others it’s the adventure,” said Army Nashville Medical Recruiting Company Commander Capt. Melanie Bowman. “What most of them come to find is a real sense of satisfaction in treating soldiers who have made a conscious decision to put their lives on the line for their country.”

For cardiothoracic surgeons who are interested in military service, the Army offers up to \$250,000 in student loan repayment as well as other incentives, such as specialty pay. Surgical residents may join the Army and receive a stipend while completing their residency programs. For more information regarding Army medical careers, visit www.goarmy.com/amedd or call 1-888-710-ARMY.

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This release was written by Ms. Lisa Simunaci



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Cutline: Army Reserve Col. Timothy Mullet receives a reminder of home while serving in Afghanistan.

