

# 440th reservist recognized nationally for efforts

## *Law improves benefits for injured Reserve members*

by 1st Lt. Ann Peru Knabe

*Air Force Times* has named Master Sgt. Steven Hilger, 95th Airlift Squadron 1st Sergeant, one of 1997's top three newsmakers in the Guard and Reserve.

Hilger broke his back during last April's crash of a 440th aircraft in Honduras. When he learned his benefits were less because his mission orders were for less than 31 days, Hilger joined 95th AS pilot Capt. Mike Butler to spearhead a change in federal law. Under the old system, reservists were covered medically from injuries occurring on short term assignments, their families received no benefits, even if reservists could not return to their



Senior Master Sgt. Steven Hilger was named one of three top newsmaking reservist by *Air Force Times*.

---

*"This covers reservists on UTA status, annual tour...and even driving to and from home for Reserve duty."*

---

*Master Sgt. Steven Hilger*

---

civilian jobs because of these injuries.

Hilger and Butler's efforts were rewarded on Nov. 18, 1997, when President Clinton signed the Fiscal Year 1998 Defense Authorization Bill. Section 513, "Corrections of Inequities in Medical and Dental Care and Death and Disability Benefits for Reserve Members who Incur or Aggravate an illness in the Line of Duty," redefines Reserve benefits in an equalized plan.

"The new law really is a change," explained Hilger. "If reservists are hurt in the line of duty, their orders can be extended for more than 30 days to give their families equal medical and dental benefits as active duty members. This covers reservists on UTA status, annual tour, mandays, reserve management periods, and even driving to and from home for Reserve duty."

Hilger said he talked with Congressmen Mark Neumann, Gerry Kleczka and Tom Barrett, while Butler focused his efforts on Senators Ted Kennedy and Strom Thurmond.

The bill is retroactive to Sept. 23, 1996. Prior to the equalized benefits plan going into effect, reservists could only obtain family benefits if they were assigned to orders of 31 days or more. "If you were hurt in the line of duty, you could only get incapacitation pay and allowances," said Hilger.