San Diego SEAL honored in Reserve celebration

by Paul M. Krawzak

WASHINGTON - Elite Navy SEAL Ephrayim J. Aven opted out of the active force in 2000 to avoid the repeated deployments that were keeping him away from his family.

But Aven, a San Diego area resident, was back in action as a reservist in fall 2006 when the Navy sent him on a six-month tour to the restive Al Anbar Province of Iraq.

Aven, a 38-year-old Navy lieutenant, will be singled out for his contributions when the Navy Reserve celebrates its 93rd anniversary Saturday.

He is to receive the Bronze Star for "meritorious" service while coordinating combat operations and participating in humanitarian work in Iraq from October 2006 to April 2007.

Sitting in an office in the Pentagon with his wife Gina, the father of two was reluctant to take credit for the award.

OVER THERE - Navy Reserve Lt. Ephrayim J. Aven stands next to a plane at an Iraqi air base during Operation Iraqi Freedom in 2006. The Navy SEAL will be singled out for his service in Iraq on Saturday by being awarded a Bronze Star medal. CNS Photo courtesy of U.S. Navy.

"This has to do with the people who worked with me or for me," he said, referring to 40 other military personnel who served with him. "I was with a lot of young men and women who were making tremendous sacrifices in their personal life. They were doing a tremendous job."

Vice Admiral John G. Cotton, chief of the Navy Reserve, will personally present the Bronze Star to Aven.

Cotton said Aven and several other sailors were chosen to participate in the event because of the unique stories they have to tell.

"It's a significant award received in a combat environment," Cotton said of Aven's Bronze Star during an interview at the Pentagon Friday.

Even though he is no longer in the active force, Aven has continued to work for the SEALs as a civilian information manager at Naval Special Warfare Center in Coronado.

"I know I'm contributing to the community," he said, when asked why he chose to stay with the Navy rather than do something else.

A native of Seattle, Wash., Aven enlisted in the Navy in 1989 after becoming dissatisfied with his job at a lumber mill. He served in Europe with Little Creek, Va.-based SEAL Team Two before transferring to the West Coast-based SEALs in Coronado.

Aven won a commission as an officer in 2003 after earning a bachelor's degree during night school at National University.

Al Anbar Province in Iraq is one of the U.S. military's recent success stories. When Aven arrived there, it was a haven for Al Qaeda and Sunni insurgents and one of the most dangerous places in the country.

Since then, U.S. forces have managed to build a partnership with former Sunni insurgents who helped drive terrorists out of the province.

Reflecting on his experience, Aven said the key to the transformation was engaging tribal leaders, who in turn influenced their followers.

"We saw the change in the Iraqi people in their attitude to us," he said.

San Diego SEAL honored in Reserve celebration by Paul M. Krawzak