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Hometown News Release

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MTSU student balances COVID-19 service and college education

MURFREESBORO, Tenn. – Pfc. Cymphony Bates, a financial management specialist with Nashville’s 1130th Financial Management Support Detachment, was working on her Bachelor’s degree in Forensic Science at Middle Tennessee State University when the COVID-19 pandemic began spreading throughout the state. Needing to help, she felt called to serve on the Tennessee National Guard’s COVID-19 Task Force but was unsure if she could balance school with service.

Bates, a Chicago, Illinois, native living in Madison, enlisted in the Tennessee Army National Guard in November 2019. She joined Tennessee’s COVID-19 response in January 2021 as Guardsmen began assisting with vaccinations, the same month she started her spring semester at MTSU.

“I was asked to volunteer and because I had administrative training with the military,” said Bates. “I agreed and I was assigned as an administrative specialist at the Smith County vaccination site in Carthage.”

At the vaccination site, Bates monitors supply needs, confirms COVID-19 vaccination appointments for the county, verifies patient information, and observes post-shot recovery in the rare chance of a reaction.

When she began, there was some concern about the possibility Bates could continue attending college. However, after talking with the MTSU administrative staff, they assisted with making it manageable for her to balance her military service and education.

“When I let my professors know about my orders, they were concerned about how my working with the COVID-19 Task Force and going to school at the same time was possible,” said Bates. When I explained how it could be done, my professors did everything they could to make sure that I didn’t have any problems,” said Bates.

Bates just finished her spring semester with a 3.75 Grade Point Average. She looks forward to taking classes in the fall.

“My military duty is my priority,” said Bates. “Managing my time properly to get my school work done is also very important. Since I’ve been away from home and school because of my orders, it makes my college experience unique. But thanks to the support of MTSU and the National Guard, I have been able to serve Tennesseans and continue working on my degree.”

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Pfc. Cymphony Bates, a financial management specialist with Nashville's 1130th Financial Management Support Detachment, reviews information at the Smith County Department of Health's vaccination site in Carthage. Bates has been supporting the fight against COVID-19 in Tennessee communities since January. Gov. Bill Lee officially activated the Tennessee National Guard to combat COVID-19 in March 2020. (Photo by Sgt. Finis L. Dailey, III)

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