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USAMRIID Scientist Receives Medal of Honor from French Military

MAJ Jeffrey R. Kugelman, Ph.D., received the Medal of Honor from the French Military Health Service Nov. 11 at a ceremony at the French Embassy in Washington, D.C. The award recognizes his outstanding service to French Armed Forces health protection and his contributions to strengthening international collaboration between the two nations.

Kugelman, who directs the Center for Genome Sciences at the U.S. Army Medical Research Institute of Infectious Diseases (USAMRIID) at Fort Detrick, Md., spent 2.5 years as a Science and Technology attaché under an exchange program for scientists and engineers between the U.S. Department of Defense and the Department of Armed Forces in France.

“USAMRIID is proud of the impact that MAJ Kugelman’s work made for an important NATO ally,” said COL E. Darrin Cox, USAMRIID’s commander. “We greatly appreciate this recognition by the government of France.”

During his tenure from 2016-2018, Kugelman was assigned to the French National Reference Center for Arbovirus in Marseille, performing research for the Institut de Recherche Biomédicale des Armées (IRBA) and the French health services. He worked in their Biosafety Level 3 containment laboratory performing pathogen discovery and assisted with diagnostic testing during a 2016 outbreak of Zika virus.

Kugelman’s expertise in setting up bioinformatics tools was essential for analyzing databases of diagnostic results containing more than 22,000 samples taken between 2013 and 2017. These efforts led to the characterization of outbreaks affecting French Armed Forces including Chikungunya, Dengue, West Nile, Zika, and fevers of unknown origin. He contributed to pathogen discovery efforts to identify the causative agent in more than 300 samples from French soldiers who had presented with fevers of unknown origin in the African theater of operations. He also identified genetic markers of persistence of the Chikungunya virus, which could lead to a better understanding of how the virus replicates and causes disease.

In addition, Kugelman served as a mentor to several students pursuing master's degrees, as well as a Ph.D. candidate in virology and biochemistry who will defend her thesis in Dec. 2020.

"The opportunity to exchange scientific views on diseases affecting our armed forces, while building enduring relationships with my French colleagues and friends, will remain a defining point of my career and a treasured experience," Kugelman said. "It was an honor to serve."

The Medal of Honor of "Service de Santé des Armées"(SSA) was founded Aug. 30, 1962. Its purpose is to reward those who have contributed or lent their assistance to the Army Medical Service and who have particularly distinguished themselves by their service or devotion. Brigadier General Cyril Carcy, Defense Attaché of the Embassy of France, presented Kugelman with the SSA Medal of Honor (Bronze Echelon).

Kugelman is a Medical Service Corps officer who holds a Ph.D. in Pathobiology from The University of Texas at El Paso. During his first assignment to USAMRIID, he served as a Biodefense Scientist and Assistant Director of the Center for Genome Sciences. In 2014, he deployed to Liberia in support of Operation United Assistance, where he provided real-time sequencing identification of Ebola-virus infected human samples. In 2015, Kugelman served as a Medical Research and Materiel Command Liaison Officer to the Army G8 Office of Chemical and Biological Defense before being selected for the exchange program with France. In 2019, he rejoined USAMRIID in his current capacity.

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About the U.S. Army Medical Research Institute of Infectious Diseases:

For over 50 years, USAMRIID has provided leading edge medical capabilities to deter and defend against current and emerging biological threat agents. The Institute is the only laboratory in the Department of Defense equipped to safely study highly hazardous viruses requiring maximum containment at Biosafety Level 4. Research conducted at USAMRIID leads to medical solutions – vaccines, drugs, diagnostics, information, and training programs – that benefit both military personnel and civilians. Established in 1969, the Institute plays a key role as the lead military medical research laboratory for the Defense Threat Reduction Agency's Joint Science and Technology Office for Chemical and Biological Defense. USAMRIID is a subordinate laboratory of the U.S. Army Medical Research and Development Command. For more information, visit www.usamriid.army.mil.