

Portage grad serves at the president's elbow

David Kalinske accompanied Obama on trip to Kalamazoo

BY KATHY JESSUP
KALAMAZOO GAZETTE

WASHINGTON — In the late 1980s, David Kalinske carried the football for the Portage Central Mustangs.

Now he has spent nearly two years carrying the country's "nuclear football" — containing the codes to launch an atomic attack — for two U.S. presidents.

Kalinske, 39, a 1988 Portage Central alumnus, has the credentials for Tom Cruise swagger. But he remains low-key about his assignment at the elbow of the president.

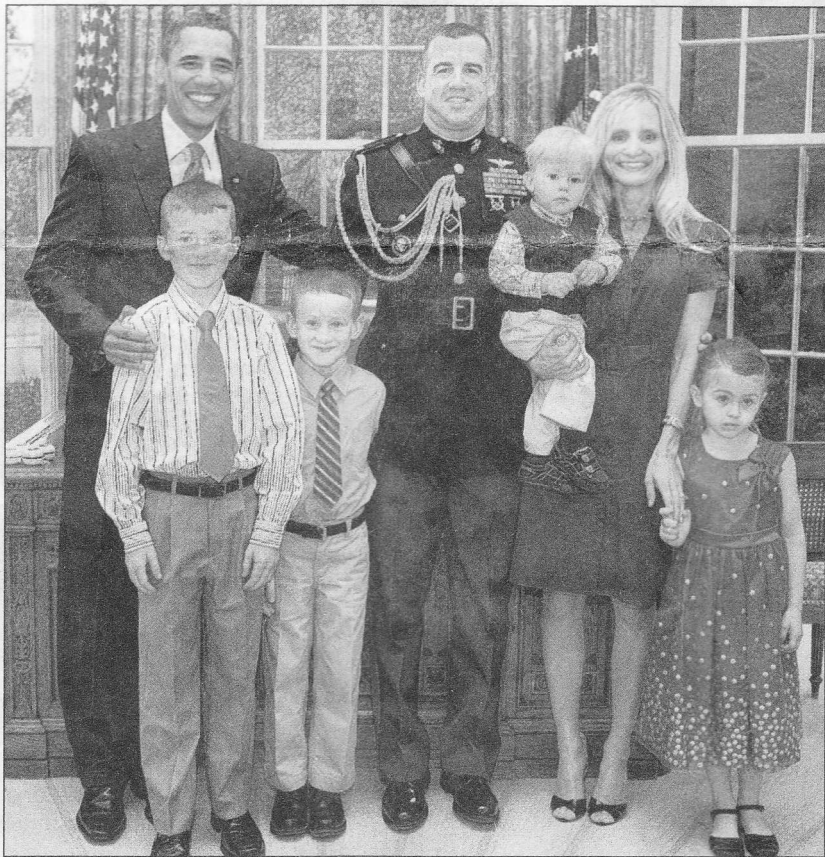
He's a Top Gun military pilot and flew "shock and awe" bombing raids during Operation Iraqi Freedom from a U.S. aircraft carrier.

On Monday, Kalinske was the Marine lieutenant colonel who was never far from President Barack Obama's immediate circle when the president came to address Kalamazoo Central High School graduates.

After four tours of duty, Kalinske said he expected to get a Pentagon assignment two years ago where life would be a bit more normal for the married father of four.

But the Marines had something else in mind, selecting Kalinske to represent it as military aide to the president of the United States.

He was appointed to the position during the final year of President George W. Bush's tenure in office and stayed on when Barack Obama was sworn in.



COURTESY PHOTO

At his side: U.S. Marine Corps. Lt. Col. David Kalinske, a 1988 Portage Central graduate, is assigned to President Barack Obama. In this photo, taken last fall when Kalinske's rank was major, he and his wife, Denise, stand with their children. The children, and their current ages, are from left, Tyler, 11; Kade, 9; Chase, 2; and Ava, 6.

The job of being the military shadow to the president demands rotating, 24-hour shifts and comes with an office in the East Wing of the White House and sleeping quarters there.

Unlike movie versions of his job, Kalinske said the attache containing

the president's nuclear launch codes is never chained to his wrist as he accompanies the commander-in-chief to all sorts of appearances and trips.

But Kalinske's former Portage football coach, Bob Knight, said he

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