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Airmen receive first AF Combat Action Medals

by Staff Sgt. Monique Randolph
Secretary of the Air Force Office of Public Affairs

6/12/2007 - **WASHINGTON (AFPN)** -- Air Force Chief of Staff Gen. T. Michael Moseley awarded six Airmen the Air Force Combat Action Medal during a ceremony June 12 at the Air Force Memorial. These Airmen were the first in the Air Force to receive the new medal.

Recipients of the award were Maj. Steven A. Raspet, Capt. Allison K. Black, Senior Master Sgt. Ramon Colon-Lopez, Master Sgt. Charlie Peterson, Master Sgt. Byron P. Allen and Staff Sgt. Daniel L. Paxton.

The medal was created to recognize Air Force members who were engaged in air or ground combat off base in a combat zone. This includes members who were under direct and hostile fire, or who personally engaged hostile forces with direct and lethal fire.

"As we thought about the 700,000 (Total Force) Airmen out there today who epitomize the warrior ethos while in combat on the ground or in the air, we began to think through this notion of a combat action ribbon that is part of our culture and our heritage," said General Moseley. "We believe our Airmen know this and understand this, and live it daily through their actions.

"In fact, since that awful day in September 2001, we've seen a dramatic increase in the number of Airmen engaged with or engaging hostile forces during performance of their duties, many of them on the surface, outside the wire, in nontraditional roles for Airmen," the general said. "We wanted an award to serve as an outward and visible reminder that combat is a fundamental part of being an Airman. And we wanted an Air Force-specific award for Airmen to wear proudly on their uniforms."

The medal's design is one of a kind, General Moseley said. It is the only American award with a diagonal stripe. The design was inspired by a personal insignia Brig. Gen. William "Billy" Mitchell had painted on the aircraft he flew over the St. Mihiel, (France) in September 1918. He flew the aircraft while developing plans for what would become the first major American offensive in World War I.

"(General Mitchell's) legacy is manifested in today's Air Force in so many ways, not the least of which is this new medal," said General Moseley. "This year we celebrate the 60th anniversary of his most important legacy... the creation of the United States Air Force as an independent service."

Members of General Mitchell's family were present for the ceremony. General Moseley presented General Mitchell's grandson, Tom Gilpin, with a shadow box commemorating General Mitchell's service and influence on the medal.



Air Force Chief of Staff Gen. T. Michael Moseley awards an Air Force Combat Action Medal to Master Sgt. Byron Allen at the Air Force Memorial June 12 in Arlington, Va., June 12. Sergeant Allen was one of six Airmen to receive the medal, awarded to Airmen who have been directly in harm's way, engaging enemy forces. Sergeant Allen was serving as an MH-53 aerial gunner was conducting a combat resupply mission when his aircraft came under enemy fire. Sergeant Allen is from the 1st Special Operations Group, Hurlburt Field, Fla. (U.S. Air Force photo/Donna Parry)

"While much has been said about my grandfather's unique life and limitless dedication to the advancement of air power, today highlights the loyalty he had to his fellow Airmen, his Air Force family," said Mr. Gilpin.

"My grandfather was the original Air Force wingman," he said. "Today, it's an honor to be a part of the profound connection between the heritage bestowed by my grandfather and these amazing Airmen who have continued his boldness and his courage. I know he would be pleased by the Air Force Combat Action Medal as it symbolizes so well what he stood for: facing adversity with conviction and never backing down."

General Moseley also recognized Susan Gamble, a professional artist and master designer for the U.S. Mint -- and the wife of Air Force Col. Mike Gamble -- who completed the design of the medal, in conjunction with the Army Institute of Heraldry.

"(Ms. Gamble) transformed a rough sketch into the Air Force Combat Action Medal ... This magnificent creation serves as an enduring link to our heritage and our culture," said General Moseley. "It will forever remind us of American air power pioneers, and the courage of conviction they had, ultimately forging the Air Force into an independent service 60 years ago.

"(The medal) ties the Airmen of today engaged with enemy hostiles... to the legacy of courage, valor, service and sacrifice that our predecessors left us," he said. "These Airmen, like all Airmen, stand on the shoulders of giants such as Billy Mitchell, (Henry "Hap") Arnold, (Claire) Chennault, (James) Doolittle, (Curtis) LeMay and (Bernard) Schriever," said the general. "Today we recognize these six amazing Airmen for their combat roles as warriors wielding the air power bequeathed to us by these giants."

As the citation for each recipient was read, General Moseley pinned the medal on the Airman.

"There are so many great Airmen who have done so many incredible things, so to be singled out as one of them is an honor," said Major Raspet, the first Airman in the ceremony to receive the medal.

"It's a great honor anytime you're recognized for your efforts, but I don't look at it as heroic," said Captain Black. "I'm proud to represent all the (Airmen) who will receive this award."

Recipients of the award were:

- Maj. Steven A. Raspet is an A-10 Thunderbolt II pilot with the 354th Fighter Squadron, Davis-Monthan Air Force Base, Ariz. While deployed to Afghanistan on Jan. 8, 2006, Major Raspet was the flight lead of two A-10s tasked to cover a joint Afghan/U.S. Army operation. He responded to a convoy's request for close-air support as they were taking fire from a building adjacent to their route. After confirming the exact location of coalition forces, Major Raspet executed several low roll-ins to place weapons on target. Despite communications problems and the imminent threat of ground fire, he eliminated the threat, continued to provide presence and deterred further attack for nearly an hour as the convoy transited the ambush area.

- Capt. Allison K. Black is an AC-130H gunship navigator with the 1st Special Operations Group at Hurlburt Field, Fla. While providing close-air support on Dec. 4, 2001, to a forward element of friendly forces near the enemy-held city of Kandahar, Afghanistan, she and her crew attacked enemy forces and vehicles advancing on a U.S. Special Forces and alliance strategic position. Under large caliber, enemy anti-aircraft artillery fire, Captain Black continued the assault at below minimum altitude, destroying enemy personnel and equipment, and leading to the eventual capture of Taliban and Al-Qaeda strongholds in Afghanistan.

- Senior Master Sgt. Ramon Colon-Lopez is a pararescueman with the U.S. Air Force Pararescue/Combat Officer School at Kirtland AFB, N.M. While deployed to Afghanistan on March 11, 2004, Sergeant Colon-Lopez, his advance force operations team and elements of the Afghan national strike unit conducted operations to capture a high-value target and a follow-on sensitive site exploitation to prevent proliferation of chemical weapons in theater. During the helicopter infiltration, the team took sustained small-arms weapons fire inflicting

serious damage to the aircraft. With rounds impacting all around him and unsure of the size of the enemy force, he pressed forward, overrunning enemy positions. The raid resulted in two enemy kills, 10 enemy apprehensions and the destruction of rocket-propelled grenades and small caliber weapons.

- Master Sgt. Charlie Peterson is a vehicle operator with the 927th Logistics Readiness Squadron at Selfridge Air National Guard Base, Mich. During his deployment to Iraq on July 28, 2004, Sergeant Peterson was operating the command vehicle for a 20-vehicle supply convoy near Balad Air Base. Halfway through their transit, Sergeant Peterson's vehicle was hit by an improvised explosive device filled with ball bearings. The 18-wheel truck preceding his vehicle also was hit and became engulfed in flames while Sergeant Peterson's vehicle was left inoperable and without communications. Despite taking shrapnel and glass in his head and left arm, Sergeant Peterson left the command vehicle, obtained the medical status of his convoy commander and gunner, who were in the same vehicle, secured the perimeter and used a global positioning system to notify the battle staff of the enemy engagement. The convoy was rerouted to a safe zone where Sergeant Peterson was medically evacuated by helicopter to receive treatment for his wounds.

- Master Sgt. Byron P. Allen is an MH-53 Pave Low helicopter aerial gunner assigned to the 1st Special Operations Group at Hurlburt Field, Fla. While serving as part of a two-ship formation on April 12, 2004, Sergeant Allen was conducting a combat resupply mission inside Iraq. The lead helicopter was shot down by Iraqi insurgents and Sergeant Allen's helicopter was engaged by a barrage of surface-to-air fire. He returned accurate fire, spotted the downed aircraft and talked his pilot through a flawless approach. Sergeant Allen then directed the recovery effort by setting up a perimeter and covering special forces members while they recovered the other crew. As the aircraft limped back into the air, they were again engaged by enemy fire. Only 20 minutes after the shoot down, Sergeant Allen and his crew delivered the recovered airmen to medical assistance.

- Staff Sgt. Daniel L. Paxton is an aero-evacuation technician assigned to the 43rd Aeromedical Evacuation Squadron at Pope Air Force Base, N.C. On March 28, 2003, Sergeant Paxton was part of a mission to establish a series of tactical medical units along the border of Kuwait and Iraq. His convoy came under enemy fire from mortars, rocket-propelled grenades, machine guns and small-arms fire. Sergeant Paxton and his team, with no intra-vehicle communications, reacted to the ambush and returned fire, successfully defending their assets as they executed a coordinated withdrawal. Under the cover of darkness and using night vision devices, the convoy headed out and the enemy again opened fire. During the next 18 hours, the convoy came under fire five subsequent times and Sergeant Paxton successfully engaged the enemy with return fire, defending himself and the convoy as they progressed on their mission.

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