

HURLBURT'S 720TH SPECIAL TACTICS GROUP RECEIVES COMBAT AWARD by Jeff Barker, Daily News

February 4, 2010 - HURLBURT FIELD — The Air Force has awarded the 720th Special Tactics Group the Gallant Unit Citation for heroism in combat.



<<<< *The Gallant Unit Citation is awarded to Air Force units for extraordinary heroism in action against an armed enemy of the United States while engaged in military operations involving conflict with an opposing foreign force on or after Sept. 11, 2001.*

The award was given for the unit's work during Operation MEDUSA, which lasted through all of 2006 and 2007 in Afghanistan. The 720th was the only Air Force unit to receive a Gallant Unit Citation during that period.



“This is almost as high as it gets,” said Col. Bradley Thompson, the group's commander.

Throughout Operation MEDUSA, the 720th carried out more than 130 close-air support missions, communicating with aircraft to tell them where the enemy is.

The nearly 1,000 airmen in the 720th are highly specialized; their skills require an average of two years of training.

Combat controllers act as air traffic controllers for fighter jets. They have the same qualifications as civilian air traffic controllers at airports, Thompson said. A tactical control party helps them aim air strikes at enemy targets.

“The greatest weapon the combat controller has is that radio on his back to bring air power to bear on that enemy,” Thompson said.

Para-rescuemen, who have the same qualifications as ambulance drivers, rescue and treat wounded troops, Thompson said. They even have a “jaws of life” that can be lowered from a helicopter and to pry open a downed helicopter.

The special ops weather team sets up sensors to monitor the weather. Data gathered helps determine whether the timing of a mission must be changed.

Thompson said a great example of what set the 720th apart was the action of a combat controller who earned a Bronze Star. He continued to call in air support after a bullet hit him in the stomach.

NOTE: This online-only information was added to the CCT history after publication of *The Eye of the Storm – A history of Combat Control Teams*.

“He stayed on the radio and continued to bring order to chaos. He even called in his own casualty operation helicopter,” Thompson said.

The Air Force created the Gallant Unit Citation in 2004 to recognize Air Force active duty, Reserve and Air National Guard units for extraordinary heroism in action against an armed enemy of the United States in the military conflicts that have followed 9/11.

“We received an award, but every day we have men in harm’s way, getting it done quietly on the battlefield,” Thompson said.

720th SPECIAL TACTICS GROUP OVERVIEW

Special Tactics Teams belong to Special Tactics Squadrons (STS) and are part of Air Force Special Forces Command (AFSOC). An umbrella organization, the 720th Special Tactics Group, trains, organizes and equips the 800 or so CCTs, PJs and SOWT operators within the various squadrons. Current active Special Tactics Squadrons:

21st Special Tactics Squadron (21st STS)
Pope Air Force Base, North Carolina

22nd Special Tactics Squadron (22nd STS)
Hulbert Field, Florida

23rd Special Tactics Squadron (23rd STS)
JBLM McChord Field, Washington

24th Special Tactics Squadron (24th STS)
Pope Air Force Base, North Carolina
(part of the Joint Special Operations Command – JSOC)

123rd Special Tactics Squadron
Kentucky Air National Guard

125th Special Tactics Squadron
Oregon Air National Guard

320th Special Tactics Squadron
Kadena Air Base, Japan)

321st Special Tactics SquadronRAF Mildenhall, England

Since October 2008, the 720th Special Tactics Group has included a dedicated [TACP Squadron](#), in the form of the **17th Air Support Operations Squadron**.