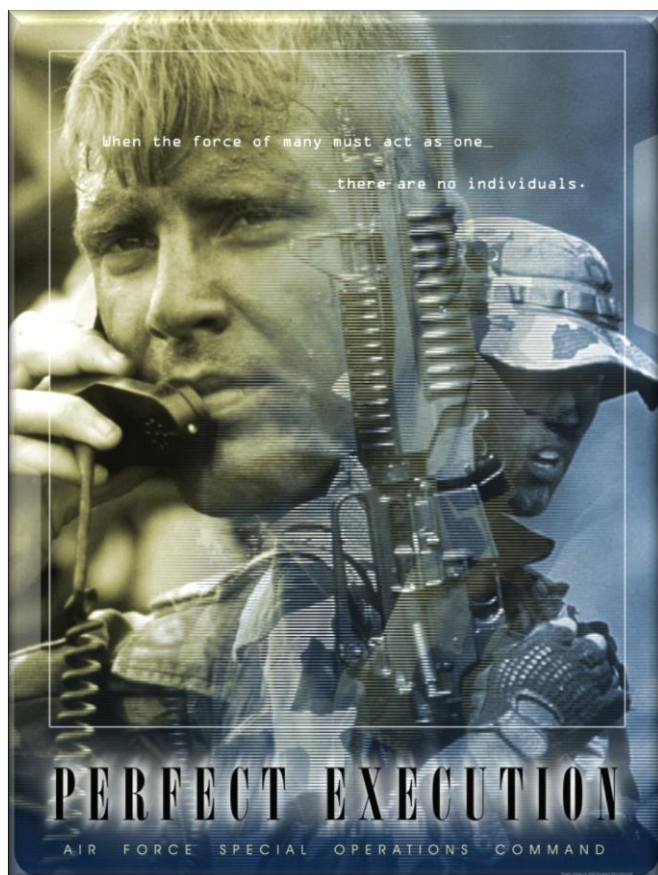


COMBAT CONTROLLERS RECOGNIZED FOR HEROIC ACTIONS by Buffy Galbraith
Air Force Special Operations Command Public Affairs

February 11, 2010 - Hurlburt Field, Florida (AFNS) -- Nine 23rd Special Tactics Squadron combat controllers here were awarded 12 medals during a ceremony at Fresques Auditorium inside the Special Tactics Training Squadron here Feb. 5.

A standing-room-only crowd was on-hand to witness the presentation of 10 Bronze Star medals, one with Valor, and three Air Force Combat Action medals by the commander of Air Force Special Operations Command, Lt. Gen. Donald C. Wurster.



<<<<
AFSOC Poster (Courtesy US Air Force)

"Today is a day to recognize the heroes among us, and I am here to tell you that you are making a difference," said General Wurster. "I am proud of each of you and respect what you do for our country."

Tech. Sgt. Christopher Grove was presented two Bronze Stars, one with Valor. The Bronze Star is awarded to a person who distinguishes himself by heroic or meritorious service performed in ground combat.

According to the citation, Sergeant Grove directed overhead aircraft to engage the enemy as close as 120 meters from his position, with six 500-pound bombs during a recent deployment to Afghanistan. With 15 insurgents closing in on his position, he called for strikes without regard for his own personal safety at "danger close" range, executing his duties with professionalism and calm.

Danger close range is when friendly forces are within 600 meters of the target when calling for fire.

Other Bronze Star recipients included Lt. Col. Brett Nelson, 23rd STS commander, Maj. Gregory Mallon, Capt. Julio Terrero, Chief Master Sgt. Antonio Travis, Senior Master Sgt. Carlos Neris, Master Sgt. Donald Stevens, Tech. Sgt. Joseph Hepler and Staff Sgt. Ryan Carter.

Air Force Combat Action Medals were presented to Captain Terrero, Chief Travis and Sergeant Stevens.

The Air Force Combat Action Medal is awarded to an individual who actively participates in combat under direct and hostile fire while operating in unsecured space, or physically engaging hostile forces

with direct and lethal fire.

Col. Brad Thompson, the 720th Special Tactics Group commander, spoke briefly about the men and their commitment to serve.

"You do it for your brothers and you do it for your nation," he said. "We're thankful and grateful to you."

Combat controllers are trained special operators and certified Federal Aviation Administration air traffic controllers. They deploy, undetected, into combat and hostile environments to establish assault zones or airfields, while simultaneously conducting air traffic control, fire support, command and control, direct action, counter-terrorism, foreign internal defense, humanitarian assistance and special reconnaissance in the joint arena.

Their motto, "First There," reaffirms the combat controller's commitment to undertaking the most dangerous missions behind enemy lines by leading the way for other forces to follow.

Air Force Special Operations Command graphic added by editor for emphasis.