

12 OUTSTANDING AIRMEN FOR 2010 SELECTED by Randolph AFB, Texas Public Affairs

8/3/2010 - RANDOLPH AIR FORCE BASE, Texas (AFNS) -- Air Force officials selected the 12 Outstanding Airmen of the Year for 2010.



An Air Force selection board at the Air Force Personnel Center here considered 36 nominees who represented major commands, direct reporting units, field operating agencies and the Air Staff. The board selected the 12 Airmen based on superior leadership, job performance and personal achievements.

The nominees are authorized to wear the Outstanding Airman of the Year ribbon, while the 12 winners will wear the bronze service star device on the ribbon.

The winners will also wear the Outstanding Airman of the Year Badge for one year from the date of formal presentation.

The winners are:

- Senior Master Sgt. Steven Higgins, U.S. Air Forces in Europe
- Master Sgt. James P. Mogren, Air Force Material Command
- Master Sgt. Sarah A. Sparks, Air Force Space Command
- Tech. Sgt. Anthony G. Graham, Pacific Air Forces
- Tech. Sgt. Stephen R. Hunter Jr., Air Force Reserve Command
- Staff Sgt. Joseph R. Aton, Air Combat Command
- Staff Sgt. Kenneth I. Walker III, Air National Guard
- Staff Sgt. Robert Gutierrez Jr., Air Force Special Operations Command**
- Staff Sgt. Zully M. Renon, Air Education and Training Command
- Senior Airman Cheryl A. Moore, Air Force District of Washington
- Senior Airman Ryan D. Pfeifer, Air Force Global Strike Command
- Airman 1st Class Samuel A. Siewert, Air Mobility Command

Air Force Association officials will honor the 12 Outstanding Airmen of the Year during its Air and Space Conference and Technology Exposition in Washington, D.C., in September.

The Airmen will also serve as members of the AFA's enlisted advisory council for the next year.

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GUTIERREZ BACKGROUND STORY

COMBAT CONTROLLER'S ACTIONS EPITOMIZE THE ETHOS OF SPECIAL TACTICS

December 2, 2008 - Mildenhall, England -- Staff Sergeant Robert Gutierrez, Jr., an Air Force Special Tactics Combat Controller assigned to the 352nd Special Operations Group at RAF Mildenhall, deployed to Afghanistan in early January 2008.

During one of many missions, Sergeant Gutierrez was on patrol searching for a high-value target when his Special Forces Operational Detachment Alpha team was ambushed.



Traveling along a mountain road, his team's convoy took insurgent fire from the right of their position as they neared a bridge -- across from the compound they were to search.

His ODA (Special Forces A-team) crossed the bridge by foot to check houses in the compound, and once again came under intense enemy fire - this time from three sides of their position.

Cut off from the heavy weapons in their convoy and pinned down by insurgent fire, the situation grew worse with each passing moment. The team leader was incapacitated within minutes and another team member was wounded and stranded in the enemy "kill zone." With the enemy pressing for advantage, Sergeant Gutierrez went to work.

He directly engaged and killed four insurgents with his M-4 Carbine and orchestrated eight strafing runs from A-10 aircraft onto multiple targets threatening to overrun their location.

The A-10 passes gave him and a team member the opportunity to run in and out of the "kill box" to retrieve their critically wounded teammate.

Consolidating the team's position, Sergeant Gutierrez then directed more than 70 close air support strikes over the next five plus hours while repelling numerous attempts by insurgents to overrun their position. His focus and technical battlefield expertise were deciding factors to the

team's survival - a fact borne out by the operation's final numbers.

"I determined the enemy's positions as fast as I could," he said. As he continuously directed A-10 Thunderbolts, F-15 Strike Eagles and AH-64 Apache helicopters onto multiple targets surrounding their position, often with the enemy just meters away.

Afterward, he used both A-10s and UAVs, to keep the enemy at bay and gain information on enemy positions, maintaining a protective fire suppression blanket for his team from the air.

After the battle subsided and the area was secure, he called in two medical evacuation flights for his wounded and fallen teammates.

During the engagement, Sergeant Gutierrez synchronized airstrikes, utilized UAVs, and his team's organic firepower to effectively incapacitate more than 240 insurgent enemy fighters, including the "high-value target," the objective of the entire mission.

A senior leader from his unit said, "Sergeant Gutierrez's actions that day epitomized the ethos of special tactics. He willingly risked his life to save a teammate. He maintained his composure in the darkest of circumstances and aggressively pursued the enemy using every asset at his disposal. Sergeant Gutierrez is a warrior in every sense of the word."

CITATION TO ACCOMPANY THE AWARD OF THE BRONZE STAR MEDAL (WITH VALOR) TO ROBERT GUTIERREZ, JR.

Staff Sergeant Robert Gutierrez, Jr., distinguished himself by heroism as a Special Tactics Combat Controller, 21st Expeditionary Special Tactics Squadron, Combined Joint Special Operations Air Component while engaged in ground combat against an enemy of the United States in Afghanistan on 6 April 2008. On that day, Sergeant Gutierrez was attached to Army Special Forces Operational Detachment-Alpha 3312 as a Joint Terminal Attack Controller, in support of Operation COMMANDO WRATH. He provided critical Airmanship skills during a violent 6 and a half hour battle against heavily armed and entrenched enemy fighters. While approaching the objective, while climbing near-vertical terrain, the assault force was ambushed by anti-Coalition forces which pinned down the lead team on a 60-foot high rock cliff and produced several friendly casualties. Sergeant Gutierrez coordinated with the engaged element and directed lethal gun, missile, and bomb attacks from AH-64s and F-15Es. Despite these strikes, the attack intensified onto his team's position. Despite being struck twice by 7.62 millimeter bullets in the helmet, Sergeant Gutierrez maintained his calm demeanor and continued to prosecute targets. As the fight continued, the insurgents shifted their efforts toward arriving helicopters and engaged them with heavy fire. Sergeant Gutierrez coordinated with the ground force commander to delay friendly force extraction until the enemy positions could be suppressed. Enabled his systematic control of air power during the fight, all 17 friendly casualties were safely evacuated and 40 enemy fighters were killed. By his heroic actions and unselfish dedication to duty, Sergeant Gutierrez has reflected great credit upon himself and the United States Air Force.



Mr. President, as I mentioned earlier, it was our privilege to honor these heroic Green Berets, who were joined at the lunch by SSG Robert Gutierrez, Jr., an Air Force special tactics Combat Controller who targeted airstrikes during the mission. For his actions, he was awarded the Bronze Star Medal with ``V'' device for valor, a Purple Heart, and an Air Force Combat Action Medal. Statement by unknown speaker.