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Air Force Awards First Combat Action Medals

By Staff Sgt. Monique Randolph, USAF
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WASHINGTON, June 12, 2007 – Air Force Chief of Staff Gen. T. Michael Moseley awarded six airmen the Air Force Combat Action Medal during a ceremony today at the Air Force Memorial. These airmen were the first in the Air Force to receive the new medal.



Senior Master Sgt. Ramon Colon-Lopez salutes Air Force Chief of Staff Gen. T. Michael Moseley after being presented the Air Force Combat Action Medal. The medal was presented to six Airmen in a ceremony held at the Air Force Memorial June 12 in Arlington, Va., June 12. U.S. Air Force photo by Staff Sgt. Brian Ferguson)

(Click photo for screen-resolution image); [high-resolution image](#) available.

The AFCAM 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 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," Moseley said. "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," he continued. "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 AFCAM's design is one of a kind, 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.

"(Mitchell's) legacy is manifested in today's Air Force in so many ways, not the least of which is this new medal," said 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 Mitchell's family were present for the ceremony. Moseley presented Mitchell's grandson, Tom Gilpin, with a shadow box commemorating Mitchell's service and influence on the medal.

"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," Gilpin said.

"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."

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.

"(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," Moseley said. "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," Moseley said. "Today we recognize these six amazing airmen for their combat roles as warriors wielding the airpower bequeathed to us by these giants."

As the citations for each recipient were read, Moseley pinned their medals on one by one.

"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 Maj. Steven 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 Capt. Allison K. Black, another recipient. "I'm proud to represent all the (Airmen) who will receive this award."

Recipients of the award were:

- Raspet is an A-10 pilot with the 354th Fighter Squadron, Davis-Monthan Air Force Base, Ariz. While deployed to Afghanistan on Jan. 8, 2006, Raspet was the flight lead of a two ship of 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, 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.

- Black is an AC-130H gunship navigator with the 1st Special Operations Group at Hurlburt Field, Fla. While providing close air support to a forward element of friendly forces near the enemy-held city of Kandahar on Dec. 4, 2001, Afghanistan, she and her crew attacked enemy personnel and vehicles advancing on a U.S. Special Forces and Alliance strategic position. Under large caliber, enemy anti-aircraft artillery fire, 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, 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 multiple 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, Peterson was operating the command vehicle for a 20-vehicle supply convoy near Balad Air Base. Halfway through their transit, Peterson's vehicle was impacted by an improvised explosive device filled with ball bearings. The 18-wheel truck preceding his vehicle was also hit and immediately engulfed in flames while Peterson's vehicle was left inoperable and without communications. Despite taking shrapnel and glass to his head and left arm, Peterson egressed the command vehicle, obtained medical status of his convoy commander and gunner who were in the same vehicle, secured the perimeter, and the team used a global positioning system to notify the battle staff of the enemy engagement. The convoy was rerouted to a safe zone where Peterson was medically evacuated by helicopter to receive treatment for his wounds.

- Master Sgt. Byron P. Allen is an MH-53 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, Allen was conducting a combat resupply mission inside Iraq. The flight lead aircraft was shot down by Iraqi insurgents, and 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 to a flawless approach. 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, 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, Paxton was part of a plan 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. 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 Paxton successfully engaged the enemy with return fire, defending himself and the convoy as they progressed on their mission.

(Staff Sgt. Monique Randolph is assigned to the Secretary of the Air Force Office of Public Affairs)

Biographies:

[Air Force Chief of Staff Gen. T. Michael Moseley](#)

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The Air Force Combat Action Medal takes its design from the aircraft of Air Force pioneer Brig. Gen. William "Billy" Mitchell. Created by Susan Gamble, an Air Force spouse and master designer for the U.S. Mint, the AFCAM is the first of its kind for the Air Force. It's the only U.S. medal to feature diagonal stripes and is awarded to Airmen who have been directly in harm's way, engaging enemy forces. The first medals were awarded to Airmen by Air Force Chief of Staff T. Michael Moseley June 12 at the Air Force Memorial in Arlington, Va. U.S. Air Force photo by Staff Sgt. J.G.

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