

The Outstanding Airmen

By Tamar A. Mehuron, Associate Editor

SrA. (now SSgt.) Omar Ali Abed. Security Forces Craftsman, 37th Security Forces Squadron (Air Force Reserve Command), Lackland AFB, Tex.—Helped relocate al Qaeda and Taliban prisoners from Afghanistan to US holding facility. ... Trained with joint service personnel. ... Selected for initial entry team into Afghanistan to extract captured combatants. ... Language skills (Arabic and Spanish) aided work in Afghanistan and Stateside border patrols during a homeland security deployment. ▶



MSgt. Douglas A. Ackerman. Superintendent, Aerial Port Operations, 726th Air Mobility Squadron (Air Mobility Command), Rhein-Main AB, Germany—Led stand-up of Rhein-Main as main airlift hub for Operation Enduring Freedom in Afghanistan. ... Ran loading operations for record troop movements—nearly 36,000 in one month. ... Directed first strategic-to-strategic load shift from C-5s to C-17s—done in six hours. ... Wrote plan to phase out passenger operations for scheduled closure of Rhein-Main.

SrA. Hector G. Bauza. Biomedical Engineering Journeyman Apprentice, 18th Medical Group (Pacific Air Forces), Kadena AB, Japan—USAF's Outstanding Biomedical Equipment Repair Airman of the Year 2002 ... Consistently improved operations—surpassing unit and command workflow goals despite manning shortage. ... Revamped equipment inventory system. ... Initiated paperless record archiving system. ... Designed sterilizer maintenance program, greatly reducing repair cost and time. ▶



The Air Force Outstanding Airman award is an annual program that recognizes 12 outstanding enlisted personnel for superior leadership, job performance, community involvement, and personal achievements.

The program was initiated at the Air Force Association's 10th annual National Convention, held in New Orleans in 1956.

The Chief Master Sergeant of the Air Force and the command chief master sergeants from each USAF major command form the selection board. The selections are reviewed by the Air Force Chief of Staff.

The 12 selectees are awarded the Outstanding Airman ribbon with the bronze service star device and wear the Outstanding Airman badge for one year.



SrA. (now SSgt.) Jason R. Blodzinski. Combat Control Journeyman, 23rd Special Tactics Squadron (Air Force Special Operations Command), Hurlburt Field, Fla.—Directed precision air strikes against al Qaeda and Taliban forces in Afghanistan. ... Volunteered to reconnoiter enemy front line to increase the precision of air strikes. ... Led all-night tactical movement up an 11,000-foot peak to call in close air support strikes to aid ground forces. ... Secured and prepped a remote airstrip used for combat sorties.

TSgt. James H. Coffey III. Flight Chief, 50th Security Forces Squadron (Air Force Space Command), Schriever AFB, Colo.—Led unit to excellent operational readiness inspection. ... Expert trainer—produces high scoring, exceptionally qualified troops. ... Appointed chief of security forces operations for portion of NATO's Operation Joint Forge. ... Identified and recommended improvements to security arrangements at Istres AB, France. ... Led force protection survey of hotels housing 130 US personnel—relocating some from hotel vulnerable to vehicle explosion.



SMSgt. Keith D. Finney. Chief of Heavy Repair, 51st Civil Engineer Squadron (Pacific Air Forces), Osan AB, Korea—Pointman for all tent city support. ... Managed beddown preparations for 1,500 personnel deployed for critical exercises. ... Led renovation of aircraft hangar for deployment processing. ... Created a five-year maintenance plan for airfield and base pavement. ... Directed repair of Osan's damaged airfield, eliminating foreign object damage hazard. ... Led work to remove aircraft tire rubber from runways to improve aircraft braking action.

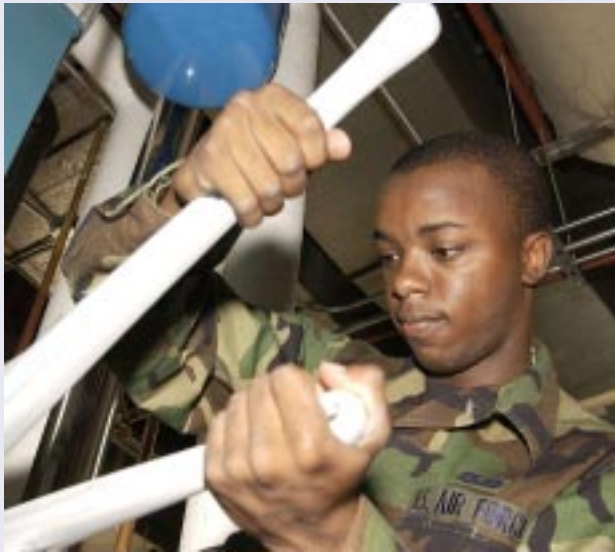
TSgt. Tara A. Marta. Noncommissioned Officer in Charge, Surveillance, Standardization, and Evaluation Flight, 932nd Air Control Squadron (US Air Forces in Europe), NAS Keflavik, Iceland—First junior NCO to hold mission crew commander technician position—qualified in record time. ... Holds six combat mission-ready positions—instructs in five. ... Reduced training time, alleviating combat mission-ready personnel shortage. Served as lead air surveillance technician for a joint Air Force–Navy exercise. ... Directed first electronic radar attack test against Iceland’s four radar sites. ... Picked to lead NORAD link recertification testing team.



SMSgt. Thomas O. McConnell. Munitions Material Superintendent, 39th Wing (US Air Forces in Europe), Incirlik AB, Turkey—Directed munitions support for 3,700 Operation Northern Watch sorties. ... Managed shipment of 1,750 short tons of special forces munitions to Afghanistan. ... Led digital encryption conversion of wing’s entire weapons inventory. ... Shepherded beddown of Joint Direct Attack Munition stores at Incirlik. ... Coordinated munitions shipments to sites throughout Southwest Asia. ... Developed dynamic explosive ordnance disposal weapons trainer.

SrA. Nathan H. Summers. C-130H Crew Chief, 317th Aircraft Maintenance Squadron (Air Mobility Command), Dyess AFB, Tex.—Received commendation for excellence from Air Force Chief of Staff. ... Key to unit earning 15 Air Force and command safety awards. ... Generated more than 600 combat sorties for Afghanistan operations. ... Led crew in producing 100 percent aircraft launch reliability for 110 straight days. ... Flew on several combat airlift missions. ... Handpicked for expeditionary combat support deployment to Aviano AB, Italy. ... Worked transport of critical repair parts for F-16 stranded on Sardinia.





SrA. Harold J. Tolbert II. Heating, Ventilation, Air-Conditioning and Refrigeration Apprentice, 9th Civil Engineer Squadron (Air Combat Command), Beale AFB, Calif.—Installed new HVAC system at combined air operations center during deployment to Prince Sultan AB, Saudi Arabia—24-hour emergency upgrade eliminated chronic overheating problem. ... Repaired another HVAC that averted shutdown of PSAB's main dining hall. ... Helped to keep PSAB's SATCOM link intact by repairing leaking refrigerant circuit. ... Aided coalition forces—repairing or replacing cooling units throughout base. ... Led unit in preventive maintenance.

SSgt. Christopher D. Tuck. Contracting Specialist, 325th Contracting Squadron (Air Education and Training Command), Tyndall AFB, Fla.—Handled 40 R&D contracts for state-of-the-art robotics used in Afghanistan. ... Deployed to Southwest Asia with expeditionary contracting team. ... Identified US vendors and thereby helped expedite deliveries—cut lead time from 24 days to five days—of war materiel to Southwest Asia. ... Conducted first local vendor survey, identifying previously unknown vendors. ... Led efforts to carry out short-notice beddown of RED HORSE unit. ▶



SSgt. (now TSgt.) Kevin D. Vance. Terminal Attack Controller, 17th Air Support Operations Squadron (Air Combat Command), Hunter Army Air Field, Ga.—Exhibited great skill and bravery. ... Two tours in Afghanistan. ... Earned Silver Star for gallantry under hostile fire during intense action in mountain warfare at an altitude of 10,000 feet. ... Directed numerous successful air strikes within 250 feet of friendlies. ... Provided covering fire for team members. ... Considered by Army Rangers as one of their own. ... Praised by both Air Force and Army Chiefs of Staff.