

Army pilots receive Distinguished Flying Cross

By Beth Miller - The (Wilmington, Del.) News Journal



From left, Italian Brig. Gen. Giacomo Bellacicco, Regional Command (West) commander, Task Force Comanche commander Lt. Col. Ronald Lukow, Capt. Paul McKnight, CW2 Timothy Pool, 4th Combat Aviation Brigade commander Col. Daniel Williams, 4th CAB Command Chief Warrant Officer, CW5 Lance McElhiney, CW3 Uriah Hayes, CW3 Donald Procter and 4th CAB Command Sgt. Maj. Donald Rose at the March 22 event at Shindand Air Base, Afghanistan, where five 4th CAB soldiers received the Distinguished Flying Cross.

CW3 Donald K. Procter, CW3 Uriah Hayes and CW2 Timothy Pool have been awarded the Distinguished Flying Cross, a medal that recognizes “exceptional heroism.”

28 medals awarded for rescue in Afghanistan

5 get DFC for Apache heroics

By John Ryan - Staff Writer

The Army has awarded 28 medals, including five Distinguished Flying Crosses, for an audacious rescue of more than 90 pinned-down soldiers, including four casualties, in Afghanistan, according to a recent Army release.

Task Force Comanche, 4th Combat Aviation Brigade, 4th Infantry Division repelled insurgent attacks in an “enemy-held” valley on Oct. 2.

Two Apache helicopters suppressed several hostile positions, while Chinooks and Black Hawks flew through dust and enemy bullets to lift Italian and Afghan special forces troops from a “hot” pickup zone in the northwestern Badghis province.

The Distinguished Flying Crosses were awarded March 22 to the operation’s flight commander Lt. Col. Ronald Lukow, and four Apache pilots, Capt. Paul McKnight, *Chief Warrant Officer 2 Timothy Pool*, *Chief Warrant Officer 3 Uriah Hayes* and *Chief Warrant Officer 3 Donald Procter*, during a ceremony at Shindand Air Base, Afghanistan.

They are the first soldiers to receive the award during the unit’s current deployment, according to the release.

Other soldiers in the rescue operation earned a total of 14 Air Medals with valor, two Air Medals and seven Army Commendation Medals for valor.

The rescue operation last fall began as a pre-dawn air assault mission into the remote valley, an area with suspected enemy activity and the harboring an insurgent leader. The 91 soldiers on the ground, all Italian and Afghan troops, were on a mission to capture the insurgent leader.

Hours after dropoff, the coalition troops reported taking fire from enemy fighters.

The insurgents had launched an unexpectedly strong resistance, said Lukow in the release.

“We knew there was potential for ground units to get in contact,” he said. “Looking back at it, though, I don’t think any of us expected that the insurgents could assemble a force as quickly as they did that day.”

Insurgents also engaged the Apaches circling overhead from several locations, careening bullets off its exterior.

Coalition ground troops soon requested an emergency extraction.

The Apaches flew “suppressive fire runs” over enemy locations to help allow friendly troops to maneuver to the pickup zone.

The Apaches maintained overhead security positions for more than an hour, surveying the skirmish, according to McKnight’s awards citation.

After the troops consolidated near the PZ, Chinooks and Black Hawks swooped down amid crossing fire and lifted the soldiers out of the valley.

“Once we touched down in the PZ, that was the first time that it hit me that we were really helping these guys out because I could see their faces,” Lukow said.

The operation is credited with saving four coalition soldiers’ lives and rescuing 87 others.

Lukow “calmly” directed the extraction “without hesitation,” disregarding his own safety, stated his citation.

The Apache pilots — McKnight, Pool, Hayes and Procter — were cited with risking their lives to suppress enemy gun positions, which was essential to the mission’s success.

The 4th CAB did not report any American casualties.

Lukow said he believed his unit won’t flinch at another distress call.

“When Task Force Comanche inserts our ground brothers on the battlefield, we take ownership to ensure we get them out, no matter the situation or their condition,” he said.

The roughly 3,000-soldier unit deployed to Afghanistan in July and is expected to return in June to Fort Hood, Texas, according the post’s public affairs office.