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United States Air Force Crew of Hawg 53 Flight to Receive 2020 Mackay Trophy

Washington, DC, June 15, 2021 – The National Aeronautic Association (NAA) is pleased to announce that United States Air Force Lieutenant Colonel Joel W. Bier and Lieutenant Colonel Leif C. Nordhagen, the aircrew of Hawg 53 flight, have been named the recipients of the 2020 Mackay Trophy.

The Mackay Trophy was first presented by Clarence Mackay in 1912 and was later deeded to the National Aeronautic Association. Administered by the United States Air Force and NAA, the trophy is awarded for "...the most meritorious flight of the year by an Air Force person, persons, or organization." The Mackay Trophy is on permanent display at the Smithsonian's National Air & Space Museum in Washington, DC.

As outlined in the United States Air Force nomination, the crew of Hawg 53 were deployed from their home station of Davis-Monthan Air Force Base, Arizona, as a two-ship formation of A-10Cs, assigned to the 354th Expeditionary Fighter Squadron, 451st Air Expeditionary Group, Kandahar Air Base, Afghanistan, in support of Operation Freedom's Sentinel.

On January 5, 2020, Lieutenant Colonel Bier and Lieutenant Colonel Nordhagen were tasked to support a troops in contact situation where the Afghan Combat Outpost was under heavy attack from Taliban forces. As the only airborne response available in Afghanistan, Hawg 53 battled significant weather, mountainous terrain, dislocated controllers, and a determined enemy to halt the attack and save the outpost from being overrun, ultimately saving the lives of 30 Afghan soldiers.

The professional ability and outstanding aerial accomplishments of the crew of Hawg 53 reflect great credit upon themselves and the United States Air Force.

"Each year, the recipients of the Mackay Trophy exemplify the best of the United States Air Force, and their flights invariably involve important objectives that achieve results and often save lives," said NAA President Greg Principato. "Hawg 53 flight is exactly in this mold. We at NAA salute Lieutenant Colonel Bier and Lieutenant Colonel Nordhagen for their excellence and bravery. They surely honor this award by their receiving it."

The Mackay Trophy will be presented on a future date to be determined. For more information or to view a complete list of previous recipients, please visit www.naa.aero.

The National Aeronautic Association is a non-profit membership organization devoted to fostering opportunities to participate fully in aviation activities and to promoting public understanding of the importance of aviation and space flight to the United States. NAA is the caretaker of some of the most important aviation awards in the world, and certifies all national aviation records set in the United States. For information, visit www.naa.aero.

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