



## **FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

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### **United States Air Force Crew of Ironhand 41 Flight To Receive 2014 Mackay Trophy**

**Washington, DC, August 20, 2015** – The National Aeronautic Association (NAA) is proud to announce that Captain Gregory R. Balzhiser, USAF, and Captain David A. Kroontje, USAF, the aircrew of the Pacific Air Forces' Ironhand 41 Flight, have been named the recipients of the 2014 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."

As outlined in the Air Force nomination, in early August 2014, the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant (ISIL) overran several Iraqi towns, home to the ethnic minority Yazidis. Over the next several days, ISIL forces began mass executing Yazidi civilians causing over 40,000 Yazidi civilians to flee north to the elevated terrain of Mount Sinjar with only the supplies in which they could carry. Faced with 120-degree temperatures and no respite, the US provided humanitarian airdrops of food and water, but the Yazidis remained trapped by ISIL blockades and were subject to constant gunfire by entrenched ISIL fighters.

Capt Balzhiser and Capt Kroontje, flying F-16Cs, orchestrated four flawless attacks during an eight hour night, flying over 500 miles over enemy-controlled terrain. Their attacks destroyed three ISIL blockades, multiple armored vehicles, one observation post, and killed ISIL fighters who were attacking Yazidi civilians on the mountain.

Their outstanding battle management caused the cessation of ISIL indirect fires on civilians, ended ISIL freedom of movement around Mount Sinjar, facilitated the evacuation corridor by reducing pressure on Peshmerga ground forces, and ultimately saved the lives of 40,000 civilians including women, children, elderly, and the infirm.

Capt Balzhiser and Capt Kroontje's dedication to duty, professionalism, bravery, courage, and airmanship displayed during the Ironhand 41 Flight reflects great credit upon themselves and the United States Air Force.

The Mackay Trophy will be presented at the NAA Fall Awards Ceremony on December 3, 2015 at the Crystal Gateway Marriott in Arlington, Virginia. For more information or to view a complete list of previous recipients, please visit [www.naa.aero](http://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 world and national aviation records set in the United States. For information, visit [www.naa.aero](http://www.naa.aero).*

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