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United States Air Force Crews of Shadow 77 and 78 Flight to Receive 2021 Mackay Trophy

Washington, DC, June 30, 2022 – The National Aeronautic Association (NAA) is pleased to announce that United States Air Force Crews of Shadow 77 and 78, 73d Expeditionary Special Operations Squadron, Joint Special Operations Air Component-Central, have been named the recipients of the 2021 Mackay Trophy.

Crew of Shadow 77:

Capt Lawrence S. Bria
Capt Sam B. Pearce
Capt Aaron M. Rigg
Maj Joshua T. Burris
Capt Michael G. Shelor
SSgt Daniel J. Mayle
SSgt Kevin P. Heimbach
SrA Denver M. Reinwald
SrA Timothy J. Cisar

Crew of Shadow 78:

Capt Culley R. Horne
1Lt William A. Bachmann
Capt Ryan M. Elliott
Capt Benjamin A. Hoyt
SSgt Dylan T. Hansen
SSgt Andrew J. Malinowski
SSgt Tyler J. Blue
SSgt Gregory A. Page
SrA Miguelle B. Corpuz

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 crews distinguished themselves in support of Operation Freedom's Sentinel when in August 2021 they alert launched from Al Dhafra Air Force Base, United Arab Emirates, for a Close Air Support mission to protect the 2,000 Americans evacuating the embassy in Kabul, Afghanistan. The crews skillfully maintained visual custody of all American personnel enroute to Hamid Karzai International Airport and provided full-motion video in real-time to the Secretary of Defense and the Joint Chiefs of Staff as they watched the evacuation transpire. Overall, the crews of Shadow 77 and 78 flew the longest unaugmented AC-130J flight to date and their efforts to safeguard the embassy evacuation directly resulted in the successful rescue of 2,000 American diplomats with zero casualties.

The professional ability and outstanding aerial accomplishments of the crews of Shadow 77 and 78 reflect great credit upon themselves and the United States Air Force.

“For more than a century, the Mackay Trophy has rewarded bravery, skill, and determination in recognizing the most meritorious flight of the year,” said NAA President, Greg Principato.

“Some years, the feat defies imagination, as is the case with Shadow 77 and 78. There were a lot of moving parts during their mission, including 2,000 American souls, and the success of Shadow 77 and 78 will live forever in the annals of U.S. Air Force history. We are proud to award these amazing crews the 2021 Mackay Trophy and I look forward to joining with Chief of Staff of the U.S. Air Force General Charles Brown in presenting 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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