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Keller receives Air Force Cross from CSAF

By Staff Sgt. Joshua Horton
123rd Airlift Wing Public Affairs

Tech. Sgt. Daniel P. Keller, a combat controller in the 123rd Special Tactics Squadron, was awarded the Air Force Cross during a ceremony here yesterday for his heroic actions on a battlefield in Afghanistan.

Keller earned the combat award — second only to the Medal of Honor — for gallantry in action against an enemy of the United States during his participation in Operation Freedom's Sentinel.

"Only 10 Airmen since 9/11 have received this honor," said Gen. David L. Goldfein, Air Force chief of staff, who presented the medal in a hangar at the Kentucky Air National Guard Base. "We never know when Airmen like Dan will risk everything for a fellow teammate in a really bad situation, but that's exactly what he did.

"As your chief, it gives me great strength to know that the special tactics community will always make the impossible seem effortlessly possible," Goldfein continued. "This is a great day for our Air Force, and may God bless this nation and those like Tech. Sgt. Keller who always have, and always will, defend her.

"I'd like to say these events and actions are remarkable, because I truly feel that to be the case, but I doubt you'd agree, Dan," Goldfein added. "I think you'd probably say you were just doing your job — doing your job like so many are today who are still taking the fight to our enemies in faraway lands. Congratulations, Dan."

While serving as a joint terminal attack controller attached to a combined joint special operations assault force on Aug. 16, 2017, Keller embarked on a clearance operation in Nangarhar Province, Afghanistan, against 350 Islamic State fighters. After 15 hours of sustained contact, the assault team struck an improvised explosive device, killing four personnel and wounding 31.

Less than 10 feet away, Keller was



Staff Sgt. Joshua Horton/KyANG

Air Force Chief of Staff Gen. David L. Goldfein (left) pins the Air Force Cross to the uniform of Tech. Sgt. Daniel Keller, a combat controller in the 123rd Special Tactics Squadron, during a ceremony here yesterday.

knocked over by the force of the blast, resulting in traumatic brain injury. Struggling to his feet, he executed air-to-ground engagements while returning fire, repulsing an enemy assault less than 150 meters away.

"I don't remember much," Keller said. "Initially, I thought I was blind. Everything went black. Then I got up and realized I wasn't blind, it was just a massive black cloud of smoke and debris. Your ears are ringing, but you could just hear screaming — just guys screaming and gunfire."

Keller helped move 13 critically wounded casualties to a helicopter landing zone "under a hail of enemy fire," according to the award citation. When medical evacuation helicopters were unable to identify the landing zone, he sprinted to the center of the field, exposing himself to enemy fire in order to marshal in both aircraft and aid in loading the casualties.

Once the helicopter departed, the ground

force commander aborted the mission. In spite of his injuries, Keller loaded wounded personnel into vehicles and volunteered to walk 2 1/2 kilometers back to a combat outpost, escorting other wounded teammates. During this movement, he repulsed a three-sided enemy attack by returning fire and simultaneously passing enemy positions to another joint terminal attack controller, allowing friendly forces to break contact. After arriving back at the outpost, Keller was evacuated for his injuries.

"His personal courage, quick actions and tactical expertise whilst under fire directly contributed to the survival of the 130 members of his assault force, including 31 wounded in action, and resulted in an estimated 50 enemy killed in action," the citation said.

To read more and view a photo gallery, visit www.123aw.ang.af.mil/News

Hourigan earns Distinguished Flying Cross

By Lt. Col. Dale Greer
123rd Airlift Wing Public Affairs

U.S. Air Force Chief of Staff Gen. David L. Goldfein bestowed the Distinguished Flying Cross on Lt. Col. John “J.T.” Hourigan during a ceremony here Aug. 10, praising the pilot’s “exceptional airmanship under duress.”

Hourigan distinguished himself by extraordinary achievement while serving as commander of a C-130 Hercules aircraft on July 15, 2016, narrowly recovering the aircraft from a potentially fatal descent following a catastrophic mechanical failure.

“This is a big day, and this is a big deal,” Goldfein told an audience of nearly 800 Airmen, friends and family. “This is the Distinguished Flying Cross. We don’t hand many of these out.

“Every aviator here has burned into our psyche three lines that drive our response to every emergency: maintain aircraft control, analyze the situation and take proper action. This is a story I am going to use as chief for the remainder of my tenure when I talk about those three key attributes. This is a story about how all of J.T.’s training, his upbringing, his heritage and his competence all came together when lives were on the line. He performed each one of these steps, and recovered an aircraft that was heading to a possibly tragic end.

“So we’re really proud of J.T., and his team and his unit. For his steady hand under the worst conditions. Because today we celebrate the safe return of an entire crew, so that you all can continue this wing’s incredibly important mission.”

Hourigan, who held the rank of major at the time of the incident, “prevented a catastrophic aircraft mishap using superior aviation skills, expeditious problem-solving and vast knowledge of the airframe, saving five



Staff Sgt. Joshua Horton/KyANG

Lt. Col. John “J.T.” Hourigan (right), a pilot for the 123rd Airlift Wing, receives the Distinguished Flying Cross from Gen. David L. Goldfein, Air Force chief of staff, during a ceremony here Aug. 10.

crew members’ lives, himself and a \$30 million aircraft,” according to the award citation.

“At low altitude in the Owensboro, Kentucky, area, the aircraft began to vibrate with such ferocity that crew members could not interpret the flight instruments or engine gauges, and were unable to communicate normally due to extreme noise. Rapidly losing altitude and airspeed, the aircraft was shaking so violently that crewmembers thought it was coming apart.

“Lacking any instrumentation information available during training and simulator profiles, Maj. Hourigan quickly eliminated all plausible causes for the condition while simultaneously preparing for a forced landing,” the citation continues. “Without recourse to

any codified procedures, he bravely exercised independent judgment and directed a shutdown of an engine based on the throttle variation he felt in his hand.

With the aircraft continuing to decelerate and losing altitude, the engine shutdown was accomplished flawlessly 277 feet above ground.”

Maj. Hourigan then successfully recovered the aircraft and performed an emergency landing, after which the crew discovered the aircraft had suffered a catastrophic propeller failure of the engine for which Major Hourigan had directed a shutdown.

To read more and view a photo gallery, visit www.123aw.ang.af.mil/News

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We welcome your feedback. Please contact the Public Affairs Office directly if you have suggestions for articles or photography. Our office is located in Room 1160 of the Wing Headquarters Building, 1101 Grade Lane, Louisville, KY 40213.

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