



1st Helicopter Squadron Airman receives Red Erwin Award

by Master Sgt. Alan Williams
316th Wing Public Affairs

10/4/2007 - **ANDREWS AIR FORCE BASE, Md.** -- An Andrews Air Force Base Airman was presented the coveted Staff Sergeant Henry E. "Red" Erwin Outstanding Enlisted Aircrew Member of the Year award during a ceremony Sept. 28 at the Pentagon. Brig. Gen. Robert C. Kane, director of Air Operations and deputy chief of staff for Operations, Plans and Requirements, Headquarters U. S. Air Force, presented the award.

"Winning and being able to represent the unit and the AFSOC community was great," said Senior Airman Justin H. Shults, a UH-1N Special Missions Flight Engineer assigned to the 1st Helicopter Squadron. "It really was a team effort, but I was the one who was singled out. The thanks really goes to the 21 Special Operations Squadron and the 352nd Special Operations Group."

Airman Shults earned this award during his previous assignment with the 21st Special Operations Squadron, Air Force Special Operations Command, at Royal Air Force Mildenhall in the United Kingdom where he served as an MH-53 "Pave Low" flight engineer.

"He has an exemplary record of distinguished service and it underscores the great things our Airmen are doing every day," said Lt. Col. Donald Snyder, 1st Helicopter Squadron commander. "I'm very pleased to have him in our squadron."

Airman Shults was recognized for outstanding Airmanship while he was deployed for more than 100 days to Iraq and flying more than 75 sorties, which totaled more than 140 combat hours during 2006. His actions had a direct impact on the capture of 26 insurgents - three of which were considered high value targets who were suspected of developing chemical terror weapons. While deployed, he was also responsible for the safe insertion of more than 320 special operations assault forces personnel and is credited with an additional 63 missions that delivered more than 550 security forces personnel and 92,000 pounds of supplies to special operations forces outposts for sustainment.

"It's absolutely fantastic to get an experienced aircrew member assigned to the 1st Helicopter Squadron," said Chief Master Sgt. Anthony Manson, 316th Operations Group superintendent. "His experience and performance in combat are great assets to the squadron. And, being selected for the "Red" Erwin award clearly identifies him as one of the very best. He has a bright future as a career enlisted aviator."

In addition to his combat accomplishments, Airman Shults earned four awards of the Air Medal in 2006 alone and was lauded for his participation in the assisted departure of 520 American citizens from the U.S. Embassy in Beirut. He received the 352nd Special Operations Group Staff Sgt. Henry E. "Red" Erwin Outstanding Enlisted Aircrew Member of the Year for 2006; the Airman of the Year 2006 for the 21st Special Operations Squadron; and Airman Professional Performer of the Quarter for the 3rd Quarter 2006 for the 21st Special Operations Squadron.

Airman Shults is a recent graduate of UH-1N Initial Qualification Training at Kirtland Air Force Base, N.M. where he earned distinguished graduate honors and he was selected for promotion to staff sergeant.

The "Red" Erwin Award, which it is more commonly known as, was authorized in 1997 and dedicated in memory and recognition of the Medal of Honor recipient.

Staff Sgt. "Red" Erwin served as a B-29 radio operator assigned to the 52nd Bomb Squadron, 29th Bombardment Group, 20th Air Force in the Pacific theater. On April 12, 1945 while flying on a B-29, named the



Senior Airman Justin H. Shults, 1st Helicopter Squadron flight engineer, meets Chief Master Sergeant of the Air Force Rodney J. McKinley, at the Pentagon, Sept. 28. Airman Shults was recognized as the Staff Sgt. Henry E. "Red" Erwin Outstanding Enlisted Aircrew Member of the Year. This award is given annually to Flight Engineers, Loadmasters, Air Surveillance Operators and related career fields for their outstanding leadership and sustained self-improvements in support of enlisted aircrew operations. (US Air Force/SSgt Suzanne Day)

"City of Los Angeles," Sergeant Erwin and the crew were on a mission to attack a chemical plant in Koriyama, Japan. While launching signal flares to guide the formation, one flare misfired and hit Sergeant Erwin in the face.

In the smoke-filled aircraft, Sergeant Erwin managed to cradle the 1300-degree flare in his bare hands and struggled more than 20 feet to hurl it through the co-pilot's window, which undoubtedly saved the aircraft and crew. With little expectation of survival, Gen. Curtis E. LeMay ensured the Medal of Honor was approved in less than a week and it was presented at his hospital bedside April 19, 1945 by Maj. Gen. Willis Hale, commander of the Army Air Forces in the Pacific. Miraculously, Sergeant Erwin survived. This award is the most prestigious and highest level of recognition for enlisted aviators and recipients of this award may wear the Air Force Recognition ribbon.