

## Pave Hawk Crews Win MacKay Trophy for Sandstorm Rescue

Crews of two Sikorsky HH-60G Pave Hawk helicopters received this year's MacKay Trophy for rescuing five crewmembers from an Army CH-47 that crash-landed in a sandstorm near Kharbut, Iraq, about 70 miles southeast of Baghdad, on April 16, 2004. The annual trophy awarded by the Air Force and the National Aeronautic Association recognizes the most meritorious Air Force flight of the year. The rescue required the two Pave Hawk crews home-based at Moody, Air Force Base, Georgia to fly in into almost zero visibility to get to the Chinook crash scene.

After launching from a site north of Baghdad, pilots of the two HH-60Gs – call signs Jolly 11 from the 41st Rescue Squadrons and 12 from the 38th RS – penetrated the storm on night vision goggles and soon lost sight of one another and the ground. They broke formation, turned back north to clear the weather and regain their bearings, and then flew into the storm once again at extremely low altitude to stay under the blowing sand.

The Air Force rescue crews were unable to establish communication with the Army aviators on the ground, and the entire crew had to help fly the aircraft by looking for the survivors and cueing the pilot about airspeed and altitude.

After the pickup, the Pave Hawks separated again until they were clear of the storm, and then rejoined for the return flight under RPG and missile fire from the ground. The helicopters provided covering fire for one other and flew back to land at Balad hospital.

The Pave Hawk crews included Capts. Bryan Creel, Joseph Galletti, and Robby Wrinkle, 1st Lt. Gregory Rockwood, Tech. Sgts. Michael Preston, Thomas Ringheimer and Paul Silver, and Staff Sgts. Vincent J. Eckert, John Griffin, Edward Ha, Patrick Ledbetter, Matthew Leigh and Michael Rubio.