

**AFA presents five special awards to
the top air crews and missile
crews of the year.**

The Finest Crews in the Force

BY C. V. GLINES

THERE is no more important measure of an air force than the caliber of its people who stand ready to fly and fight. It follows, then, that the aircrews and missile crews who do it best are special indeed.

At its National Convention this month, AFA will present five awards named for five general officers who made their marks in Air Force history. The awards go to the year's top crews from the US Air Force: the Curtis E. LeMay Award to the top strategic aircrew; the Thomas S. Power Award to the best strategic combat missile crew; the William H. Tunner Award to the best aircrew in Military Airlift Command; the Jerome F. O'Malley Award to the best reconnaissance crew; and the Claire Lee Chennault Award to the outstanding aerial warfare tactician.

The O'Malley Award

The award goes to Maj. John J. Smith, a U-2/TR-1 flight commander assigned to the 99th Strategic Reconnaissance Squadron of the 9th Strategic Reconnaissance Wing at Beale AFB, Calif.

The O'Malley Award winner, in full pressure suit, prepares for a flight. Maj. John J. Smith is a U-2/TR-1 flight commander assigned to the 99th Strategic Reconnaissance Squadron, 9th Strategic Reconnaissance Wing, Beale AFB, Calif. In 1988, he saved the day in at least two aircraft emergencies and performed twenty sensitive reconnaissance missions.



Smith is being honored for his "superior airmanship, exceptional aircraft systems knowledge, and outstanding judgment." In 1988, he flew twenty operational sorties over "extremely sensitive geopolitical areas supporting national reconnaissance objectives."

Smith's airmanship and decision-making abilities were clearly demonstrated on one mission while deployed overseas. Near the completion of a lengthy flight high above an overcast while the autopilot was engaged, the aircraft pitched up suddenly and the engine flamed out. Smith went through the restart procedure and was finally successful in getting a light just prior to entering a solid overcast. Gen. John T. Chain, CINCSAC, noted in forwarding the nomination that Smith "with minimum navigational aids was able to locate the takeoff base and accomplish flameout-landing procedures in rapidly deteriorating weather conditions, thus saving a valuable strategic reconnaissance asset."

Smith, forty-one, was involved in another emergency episode during the year, this time as a ground supervisor of a training sortie. When a pilot trainee was descending from high altitude, the aircraft landing gear extension system failed. Smith, in continuous communication with the pilot, analyzed the gear emergency procedures to correct the malfunction, but nothing worked. Undaunted, Smith then briefed the pilot on the procedures to be followed for an intentional, tail-gear-only landing. The result: The pilot made a "picture-perfect landing with minimal damage to the aircraft," according to the award recommendation from SAC.

An AFROTC graduate of Central Washington University in 1970, Smith earned a degree in business administration. He was assigned to Air Training Command as an instructor in the T-37 program and to Military Airlift Command as a C-130 aircraft commander before being assigned to SAC in 1986.

The LeMay Award

The outstanding strategic aircrew award, in the name of General Curtis E. LeMay, goes to Crew S-01 of the 441st Bombardment Squadron, 320th Bombardment Wing, Fifteenth Air Force, stationed at Math-



The outstanding strategic aircrew of 1989 is Crew S-01 of the 441st Bomb Squadron, 320th Bomb Wing, Fifteenth Air Force, Mather AFB, Calif. Winners of the Gen. Curtis E. LeMay Award are (from left, standing) Capt. James M. Tinnesz, 1st Lt. Allan K. "Ken" Click, Maj. David E. Snodgrass, Maj. Cameron K. "Keith" Green, 1st Lt. James O. Preaskorn, 1st Lt. Richard T. Gindhart, and (front) TSgt. Noah L. "Skip" Elliott, Jr.

er AFB, Calif. The B-52 crew consists of Maj. Cameron K. Green, aircraft commander; 1st Lts. James O. Preaskorn and Allan K. Click, pilots; Maj. David E. Snodgrass, radar navigator; 1st Lt. Richard T. Gindhart, navigator; Capt. James M. Tinnesz, electronic warfare officer; and TSgt. Noah L. Elliott, Jr., defensive aerial gunner.

Crew S-01 started 1988 by winning the Best Synchronous and Electro-optical Visual System (EVS) Bomb Award at the Fifteenth Air Force shootout. In the ensuing months, the crew was picked to lead many higher headquarters missions, including a six-ship, live bombing exercise. During a Conventional Operational Readiness Inspection, it achieved the best damage expectancy score and an "outstanding" rating on testing. It was selected as the Fifteenth Air Force Bomber Crew of the Year.

Because of its demonstrated expertise, this crew was selected to develop a new EVS-aided bombing procedure, which won the Fifteenth Air Force Shootout Award by bettering the closest competitor's bombing average by forty-four feet. More important, Crew S-01 introduced an effective means of delivering a weapon under severely degraded equipment conditions. The

crew also demonstrated the first use of night-vision goggles during an EVS depressed-angle bomb run.

Major Green, using a standard Air Force computer, developed the Automatic Standardization/Evaluation Data Base Model Program, which has reduced the processing of forms and administrative support requirements. He also co-wrote a contingency guide, which has been flight-tested "with great success and borrowed by other wings," according to the nomination statement.

Lieutenant Preaskorn is active in the Big Brothers/Big Sisters program. Lieutenant Click, an Awards and Decorations Officer, has never had a submission rejected for correction. Major Snodgrass directs the Mather honor guard. Lieutenant Gindhart was selected to flight-test a training route and, by so doing, opened up a new live bombing range to other SAC units. He has been selected for pilot training.

Captain Tinnesz, an expert in mobility planning, helped rewrite the squadron mobility plan. Technical Sergeant Elliott was chief flight evaluator of the ASG-33 Fire Control System. His observations "gave the program managers the data they needed to make an objective and sound decision."

The Power Award

The winners of the Thomas S. Power Strategic Missile Crew Award are Capt. Dennis R. Benson and 1st Lt. Julia A. Gibbons, who make up Crew S-170 of the 351st Strategic Missile Wing at Whiteman AFB, Mo.

Benson, an Air Force Academy graduate, majored in mathematical sciences and received a master's degree in business administration from the University of Missouri. He has been selected to attend the current session of the Air Force Institute of Technology to study for a master of science degree in operations research. The twenty-seven-year-old missileer from Danbury, Conn., became the only dual-qualified missile combat crew commander and wing command post emergency action controller in 1987. In June 1988, he became the senior flight commander of the 510th Strategic Missile Squadron.

Off duty, Captain Benson served as an Air Force Academy Liaison Officer, visited local high schools and junior colleges, conducted interviews with prospective Academy cadets, and counseled students on Air Force career opportunities. He also assisted in the construction and repair of facilities at a local youth summer camp.

Lieutenant Gibbons, born at Kunsan AB, Korea, in 1963, is an AFROTC graduate of Birmingham-Southern College, Ala., where she earned a bachelor of science degree in biology. She received national at-



Crew S-170 of the 351st Strategic Missile Wing, Whiteman AFB, Mo., consists of Capt. Dennis R. Benson and 1st Lt. Julia A. Gibbons, whose SAC achievements, Minuteman missile-handling skills, and flight commander training experience have earned them this year's Thomas S. Power Strategic Missile Crew Award.

tention in 1986, when she was selected to be the deputy missile combat crew commander of the first male-female Minuteman crew in SAC's history.

Gibbons has shown expertise in her handling of significant safety-related events and intricate squadron weapon anomalies. She earned the "highly qualified" rating on her upgrade check to missile combat crew commander in 1988. While preparing for the 1989 missile competition, she compiled a personal study guide detailing many aspects of missile crew procedures. This

guide will be used for future missile competition training.

Lieutenant Gibbons's off-duty activities include service as a leader for a local Cub Scout den and as a volunteer for Project Literacy, an organization dedicated to eliminating illiteracy in the US. She also helped paint and repair a children's summer camp facility.

Benson and Gibbons not only scored highest in a SAC IG inspection, but also made the DCO Honor Roll for excellence in emergency war order and Minuteman code-handler testing and outstanding per-



Maj. Michael L. Straight, chief of F-15 academics at the USAF Fighter Weapons School, Nellis AFB, Nev., is this year's winner of the Claire Lee Chennault Award. In addition to upgrading the school's fighter weapons courses, he has drawn on his flying expertise to identify F-15 combat techniques critical to pilot training.

performances in standardized evaluation. They were noted for "their unparalleled ability to handle complex critical situations," which "puts them in the forefront of SAC's warriors during this Year of the SAC Alert Force."

The duo also co-wrote their squadron's Flight Commander/Flight Commander Deputy Guide, a comprehensive package that serves as a foundation for training flight commander crews.

The Chennault Award

"A self-starting, hard-charging Fighter Weapons School Instructor Pilot, [who] is at the forefront of tactics development and instruction," states the nomination of Maj. Michael L. Straight, chief of F-15 academics at the USAF Fighter Weapons School at Nellis AFB, Nev., for the Lt. Gen. Claire Lee Chennault Award.

Major Straight's title may imply that he is a ground school instructor who does little flying. After all, his main duty is as primary academic instructor for six generic USAF fighter weapons courses. He has updated the F-15 system syllabus and enhanced the course with updates on the latest Soviet aircraft and missile systems. He has written four articles that are now considered classics in the field of fighter tactics. He has become an expert in the field of infrared missile design and employment. As his nomination states: "His efforts not only enhanced F-15 and F-16 offensive employment with the AIM-9M, but increased the combat employment of this missile system from the A-10, F-4, and the F-111 aircraft as well."

But Straight is far from being ground-bound. His flying expertise has identified such critical areas as the optimum acceleration, turn performance, and maneuvering techniques for the F-15 in combat configurations. In addition, he was responsible for the complete restructuring and improvement of the basic fighter-maneuvering phase of flight instruction. Following a series of F-15 low-altitude incidents, Straight identified areas in the school syllabus that could be improved. TAC headquarters subsequently incorporated his suggestions into its initial qualification manuals and continuation training.



The William H. Tunner Award goes to the crew of SPAR 71, a UH-1N helicopter of the 58th Military Airlift Squadron, 608th Military Airlift Group, Ramstein AB, Germany. From left: Capt. Theodore E. Hartenstein, A1C Jeffrey T. Franco, SSgt. Gregory B. West, and 1st Lt. Daniel P. Hickey.

The Tunner Award

On August 28, 1988, during an air show at Ramstein AB, West Germany, three members of Italy's air demonstration team collided in mid-air. One aircraft crashed into the crowd of 300,000 spectators, causing many deaths and injuries. SPAR 71, a UH-1N helicopter assigned to the 58th Military Airlift Squadron of the 608th Military Airlift Group, standing by for VIP security support, quickly became airborne. It was crewed that day by Capt. Theodore E. Hartenstein, pilot; 1st Lt. Daniel P. Hickey, copilot; SSgt. Gregory B. West, flight engineer; and A1C Jeffrey T. Franco, flight engineer.

Hartenstein reached the tragic scene within four minutes, flying through smoking debris. Hartenstein hovered over the burning aircraft and used the helicopter's downwash to suppress the flames. He landed the aircraft, and the crew began to evacuate the worst casualties. Sergeant West and Airman Franco fought their way into the fire to get their first patient, an Italian captain, the team's official photographer, who suffered burns and a broken leg.

Hartenstein made two flights to

Landstuhl Army Regional Medical Center before other medically equipped helicopters arrived to assist. DUSTOFF 64, the Army medical helicopter assigned to the show, never got airborne because its crew members were also casualties of the crash.

With DUSTOFF 64 lost, SPAR 71 and its counterpart, SPAR 78, became the primary rescue helicopters. SPAR 78 did not get airborne immediately, because TSgt. Clinton Douty had run to DUSTOFF 64 to help someone escape the burning helicopter and to fight the fire. When the fire trucks arrived, he ran to his chopper; SPAR 78 landed beside SPAR 71 just as it lifted off for its first run to Landstuhl.

Within the first ninety minutes of the crash, SPAR 71 made seven sorties and 78 three; the two helicopter teams were credited with saving a total of fifteen lives. Before the operation was complete, two more 58th MAS helicopters rushed to the scene to support the medical teams. According to the narrative accompanying the MAC selection board's nomination: "Without the immediate response of the 58th MAS personnel on the scene, more lives would have been lost." ■

C. V. Glines is a regular contributor to AIR FORCE Magazine. See also his articles "Guard and Reserve All-Stars" and "Flying Blind" in this issue.