



By Wilson Brissett, Senior Editor



SSgt. Christopher Baradat

MSgt. Keary Miller

■ Valor Awards Upgraded for Eight Airmen

Eight airmen have been selected to have their valor awards upgraded to two Air Force Crosses, Silver Stars, and Distinguished Flying Crosses with Valor.

Former SSgt. Christopher Baradat, who had separated from the service, and **retired MSgt. Keary Miller** were selected to receive the Air Force Cross, the highest award for valor behind the Medal of Honor. Baradat initially received a Silver Star for his 2013 actions calling in air support while under attack with US Army Special Forces in Afghanistan. Miller initially received the Silver Star for his actions as part of the 2002 Battle of Roberts Ridge on Takur Ghar mountain in Afghanistan.

Then-Air Force Secretary Deborah Lee James presented the first two of nine upgraded valor awards that were selected as part of a long Defense Department-wide review of medals earned in the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan. At Maxwell AFB,

The Air Force Cross will be presented to former SSgt. Christopher Baradat, left, and retired MSgt. Keary Miller. Baradat rescued 150 coalition members in Afghanistan, April 6, 2013. Miller was part of the team that tried to recover two US servicemen in Afghanistan in 2002 in a 17-hour fight.

Ala., James presented **Col. Christopher Barnett** with two Silver Stars for two separate actions.

Retired Lt. Col. Gregory Thornton, **retired Lt. Col. Alan Botine**, and **retired MSgt. Kristopher Parker** were to receive Silver Stars under the review. **Lt. Col. James Holder** and **Col. David Kennedy** will be awarded the Distinguished Flying Cross with Valor, Kennedy posthumously.

Gen. Joseph F. Dunford Jr., Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, said the DOD award reviews, ordered by then-Secretary of Defense Ashton B. Carter in January 2016, are crucial. "It is really important to the force that we recognize heroism when it occurs," he said.

■ Boeing Awarded \$2.1 Billion Lot 3 Tanker Contract

The Air Force awarded Boeing the third low-rate initial production lot contract for 15 KC-46A tankers and spare parts. The \$2.1 billion contract follows the first two lots that were awarded in August 2016 for seven and 12 aircraft, respectively. "Placing an order for another 15 aircraft is another important milestone for the KC-46 program," said Col. John P. Newberry, Air Force KC-46 system program manager.

The first four test aircraft, built under the initial 2011 development contract, and the first production aircraft have completed nearly 1,500 flight hours. Boeing was originally expected to deliver the first 18 aircraft by this August, but that was delayed until January 2018, due to problems en-



Boeing photo

countered during refueling trials. The company has since reworked the boom and successfully tested it on various aircraft.

■ B-52 Engine Falls Off During Flight Near Minot

An engine fell off the wing of a B-52 Stratofortress during a training flight at Minot AFB, N.D., and the pilot was able to land the bomber without incident. The Pratt & Whitney TF33-P-3/103 turbofan engine, one of eight on the aircraft, fell off



USAF photo by MSgt. Lance Cheung

■ Aerial Gunner Awarded DFC With Valor

An aerial gunner at Kirtland AFB, N.M., received the Distinguished Flying Cross with Valor for his role in a 2011 high-risk rescue mission in Afghanistan. MSgt. Gregory Gibbs, 512th Rescue Squadron operations superintendent, was a gunner on the rescue mission near the Pakistani border, where US Army soldiers from the 101st Airborne Division were dropped in an area covered in land mines.

The soldiers immediately began taking casualties. Gibbs and his Pedro 55 HH-60G Pave Hawk crew, flew to the area to rescue the soldiers. The aircrew needed to use a hoist recovery to retrieve the soldiers, who were near five remote-trigger improvised explosive devices, according to a Kirtland news release. During the final extraction, the helicopter lost power and began to fall. Gibbs provided the pilots with positioning and altitude calls, allowing the pilots to fly backward down

and crash-landed in an unpopulated area 25 nautical miles (29 miles) northeast of the base. There were five airmen on board, with no injuries reported.

The incident happened as then-Air Force Secretary Deborah Lee James was visiting the base in part to highlight the need for modernization and improvements to the Air Force's nuclear community. The base launched an investigation into the incident.

Less than a week later, James broke with protocol, which usually demands that senior leaders refrain from discussing accidents until investigations are completed, and said the mishap doesn't signal that the Stratofortress fleet needs a quick re-engining.

She said that there were "more critical upgrades" needed to keep the B-52 combat-capable. Overall, the B-52's mission capable rate remains "excellent," she said, and there's no reason yet "to think this is a fleetwide problem," even though the B-52 is "one of our oldest aircraft."

a valley to avoid the minefield by two feet, the release states. The crew was able to recover the aircraft and fly back to Kandahar Airfield with just five minutes of fuel remaining.

"It gives me a huge sense of pride to be able to have aerial gunners, as well as enlisted, recognized for something like this," Gibbs said at the ceremony. "This is just one of several things that people in my community have done, so it feels good to tell the rescue story."



USAF photo by SRA. Nigel Sandridge

■ Heather Wilson To Be Nominated for USAF Secretary

President Donald Trump intends to nominate Heather Wilson to be the next Secretary of the Air Force. Wilson has been the president of the South Dakota School of Mines and Technology since 2013. She served from 1998 to 2009 in the US Congress, representing New Mexico's 1st District.

During her congressional career, Wilson served on the Energy and Commerce Committee, the Armed Services Committee, and the Permanent Select Committee on Intelligence.

Wilson graduated from the Air Force Academy in 1982 as a member of the third class graduating women. She was a Rhodes scholar, earning a master's and doctorate in international relations at Oxford University. She served in



US Congress photo

the Air Force until 1989, when she joined the National Security Council and worked on issues related to European defense. If confirmed, she will be the first academy graduate to serve as Secretary of the Air Force, according to the White House.

"Heather Wilson is going to make an outstanding Secretary of the Air Force," Trump said. "Her distinguished military service, high level of knowledge, and success in so many different fields gives me great confidence that she will lead our nation's Air Force with the greatest competence and integrity."

■ **As Program Rolls On, F-35 Testing Delayed**

The F-35 program probably won't enter initial operational test and evaluation on time by August, likely slipping a minimum of 16 months, Pentagon test director J. Michael Gilmore said in his final test report to Congress.

Gilmore said the program office "plans to reduce or truncate" developmental testing to "minimize delays and close out" the system development and demonstration phase as quickly as possible, but "even with this risky, schedule-driven approach" he doesn't see initial operational test and evaluation starting until late December 2018 or early 2019 "at the soonest."

The principal issues have to do with the Marine Corps' F-35B short takeoff and vertical landing variant and the Navy's F-35C carrier-capable version, the last to go through development. The Air Force's F-35A model has seen a "0.0 percent" increase in required test points in 2016, and has actually exceeded planned test points flown by 8.1 percent. The F-35A has 112 flight science test points to go, against a requirement for 12,327 test points.



USAF photo by A1C Kevin Tanenbaum

Meanwhile, the 200th operational F-35, built for the Japan Air Self-Defense Force, was delivered to Luke AFB, Ariz. The jet brings the total number of F-35s at Luke, a training base for US and international pilots, to 46. Eventually the base will host 144 strike fighters in six F-35 fighter squadrons.

The Air Force has also selected Naval Air Station Joint Reserve Base Fort Worth, Texas, as the preferred location for the first Air Force Reserve F-35 base. The base is slated to begin receiving its strike fighters in the mid-2020s.

■ **Looser Restrictions on Tattoos, Medical Standards**

The Air Force announced it is removing regulations on tattoos on airmen and allowing tattoo sleeves and other large body markings. The new policy removes the "25 percent" rule that prohibited tattoos covering about one-quarter of an exposed body part. However, tattoos on the head, neck, face, tongue, lips, and scalp are still prohibited.

In addition to the tattoo changes, the Air Force has updated medical accession standards to reflect higher requests for waivers for eczema, asthma, and attention-deficit/hyperactivity disorder (ADHD). The changes streamline and loosen the waiver requirements for these conditions, including new tests for the history of asthma, loosened standards for ADHD, and more waivers for those with a "mild" form of eczema.

The Air Force also changed regulations governing pre-accession marijuana use. The policy removes the service-prescribed numerical limitations on prior use of marijuana, while a medical diagnosis of substance-related disorders or addiction remains medically disqualifying.



USAF photo

■ **Shaw Preferred Location for New Reaper Group**

Shaw AFB, S.C., has been selected as the preferred location for a new MQ-9 Reaper group and mission control elements. Davis-Monthan AFB, Ariz.; Moody AFB, Ga.; Mountain Home AFB, Idaho; and Offutt AFB, Neb., were named as reasonable alternatives. The first airmen assigned to the group will begin arriving in Fiscal 2018, but the base will not house any remotely piloted aircraft.

The Air Force is, however, considering another location to host an MQ-9 wing, including 24 Reapers, launch and recovery elements, a mission control element, a maintenance group, and support personnel. "Intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance continues to be our No. 1 most requested capability of combatant commanders and I believe adding additional RPA locations will help our efforts to retain experienced RPA operators that contribute to this vital mission," said then-Secretary of the Air Force Deborah Lee James.



USAF photo by SrA. Christian Clausen

The War on Terrorism

US Central Command Operations: Freedom's Sentinel and Inherent Resolve

■ Casualties

By Feb. 16, a total of 33 Americans had died in Operation Freedom's Sentinel (Afghanistan), and a total of 35 Americans had died in Operation Inherent Resolve (Iraq and Syria).

The total includes 65 troops and three Department of Defense civilians. Of these deaths, 30 were killed in action with the enemy while 38 died in noncombat incidents.

There have been 146 troops wounded in action during OFS and 31 troops in OIR.

■ B-2s Hit ISIS Training Camps in Libya

Two B-2s from the 509th Bomb Wing at Whiteman AFB, Mo., flew a 34-hour round-trip mission to drop about 100 munitions on two ISIS training camps on Jan. 19, killing more than 80 fighters who had convened in the desert to train and plan future external operations.

The B-2s, supported by more than a dozen tankers and additional air strikes and surveillance by MQ-9 Reapers, hit the ISIS camps south of Sirte, where the fighters had fled after being routed by Libyan Government of National Accord fighters backed by the US in Operation Odyssey Lightning.

"We had 100 terrorists training south of Sirte, and in the United States view that was a risk we could not accept," Pentagon spokesman Peter Cook said during a briefing. The Pentagon showed video of ISIS fighters moving rocket-propelled grenades and other

munitions from two trucks at one of the camps, and a video of one of the strikes destroying small structures in the desert.

Then-Defense Secretary Ashton B. Carter said commanders picked the B-2 for the mission because of its unique capabilities, including its armament and distance. The mission is a return to Libya for the B-2s. In March 2011, three B-2s conducted strikes on military targets under the command of then-dictator Muammar Qaddafi.

■ March to Raqqa Moving as Quickly as Possible

The US-led coalition's mission against ISIS is moving as fast as it can toward the so-called caliphate's capital of Raqqa, Syria, based on the abilities and pace of friendly ground forces, a senior Pentagon official said.

Elissa Slotkin, acting assistant secretary of defense for international security affairs, said coalition support is moving "as fast as local forces on the ground are able to move." US-backed Syrian Democratic Forces are in the "isolation" phase of the approach to Raqqa, and while it is "always good to be reflecting on what more we can do," there is no easy way to simply accelerate the campaign.

"All ideas are going to be on the table" to move the fight forward, she said. "They have a plan that I believe is pushing to the limit what we can do on intensifying that campaign." Slotkin's comments echo those made by then-Defense Secretary Ashton B. Carter. Carter would not provide a timeline for ISIS's defeat but said he is confident it will conclude "as soon as possible."

■ Liberation of Eastern Mosul

Iraqi Security Forces announced the liberation of the eastern part of Mosul from ISIS control after more than three months of fighting to retake the city. Iraqi forces, supported by US and coalition troops, gained control of all of the city east of the Tigris River.

The milestone in the battle for Mosul was achieved as a result of an "increase in the tempo" directed by Iraqi Security Forces, which also allowed coalition forces to conduct air strikes "at a significantly higher rate," said Army Maj. Gen. Joseph M. Martin, commander of coalition ground forces for Operation Inherent Resolve.

Martin said 100,000 buildings had been cleared by Iraqi forces and coalition partners in the eastern part of the city and that forces were "transitioning from clearance operations to hold force." ISIS fighters "burn and destroy infrastructure" as they abandon parts of the city, Martin said, including the destruction of all five bridges that cross the Tigris.

Iraqi Security Forces will have to rebuild the bridges before they can resume their assault in the western part of Mosul. Martin said the ISF "engineering regiment" is able to bridge the river without coalition assistance, an advance over previous capabilities.



USAF photo by SSgt. Kate Thornton

A KC-135 Stratotanker from RAF Mildenhall, UK, refuels a B-2 Spirit from the 509th Bomb Wing, Whiteman AFB, Mo., in the late hours of Jan. 18, 2017, during a mission targeting ISIS training camps in Libya.



USAF video image by SSgt. Staci Miller

■ **USAF Wants To Add Five Fighter Squadrons**

The Air Force wants to add five more fighter squadrons over the next five to 10 years, going from 55 to 60 total fighter squadrons. The service is also planning to build up its Active Duty end strength to 321,000 by the end of this year, up from 317,000 last year. By the end of 2018, it hopes to bring that number up to 324,000, USAF spokesman Col. Patrick Ryder said.

The plan to add five more squadrons will take place in the out-years of future budget planning—in the late

2020s—Ryder said. It is too early to say what type of aircraft the squadrons would fly, though the service is building up its F-16 squadrons and planning to field 1,763 F-35s.

The current number of fighter squadrons is enough to fly today’s operational needs, such as the air war targeting ISIS in Iraq and Syria, though more would be needed to face high-end threats, said Ryder. For comparison, the Air Force had 134 combat-coded fighter squadrons in 1991 during the early days of Operation Desert Storm.

By the Numbers

7,000,000

The number of unmanned aerial vehicles the FAA forecasts will be sold commercially in the US in the year 2020.

Photo by Don McCullough

■ **Mattis Sworn In as 26th Secretary of Defense**

The Senate overwhelmingly approved the nomination of retired Marine Corps Gen. James N. Mattis as Secretary of Defense shortly after President Donald Trump’s inauguration on Jan. 20. Vice President Michael Pence swore him in shortly after the 98-to-one Senate vote.



“Every action we take will be designed to ensure our military is ready to fight today and in the future,” said Mattis in a message to Defense Department personnel. “Recognizing that no nation is secure without friends, we will work with the State Department to strengthen our alliances. Further, we are devoted to gaining full value from every taxpayer dollar spent on defense, thereby earning the trust of Congress and the American people. I am confident you will do your part. I pledge to you I’ll do my best as your Secretary.”

Previously, the House and Senate had voted to approve a waiver to allow Mattis to serve as Secretary even though he has not been separated from Active Duty service for seven years as federal law requires.

DOD photo by PO2 Dominique Pinero

Source: “FAA Aerospace Forecast Fiscal Years 2016-2036.”