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PAVE LOW HERO WINS 2002 PITSENBARGER AWARD

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AIR FORCE PERSONNEL CENTER (Night Flyer News Service) -- A Hurlburt Field noncommissioned officer who, despite serious injuries, defused a possible firefight with villagers in a combat zone is the 2002 Pitsenbarger Award winner.

Tech. Sgt. Navid Garshasb was selected for his heroism after the MH-53 Pave Low helicopter he was a crewmember on crashed behind enemy lines during Operation Enduring Freedom.

"This is a great honor -- I am very honored," said Sergeant Garshasb, a direct support operator or airborne linguist, known as "G" to his unit is the superintendent of scheduling in the 25th Information Operations Squadron, Hurlburt Field, Fla.

His efforts prevented an exchange of gunfire between airmen and local villagers. He potentially saved lives among all involved and avoided a potential international diplomatic incident, according to Lt. Col. John Allison, Sergeant Garshasb's former 25th IOS commander.

"G is a real live American hero," said Lt. Col. Kevin B. Wooten, commander of the 25th IOS, "the most humble individual you'd ever meet."

The MH-53 went down after encountering extreme weather conditions, compounded by high altitude. After a short time on the ground, crewmembers noticed 15 or more unidentified people approaching their position and the crew prepared to engage the possibly hostile force.

But several indications led Sergeant Garshasb to believe the group was local villagers, not necessarily hostile or enemy sympathizers.

Sergeant Garshasb put down his weapon and proceeded toward the group, not knowing their intentions. Severe pain from two-fractured vertebrae, a fractured rib and hypothermia, didn't stop him from calming the situation, using his knowledge of the local language.

After multiple attempts, he successfully informed the advancing group that by nearing the crew's location they were endangering their own lives. He told them not to get any closer and to go back to their homes, according to Colonel Allison.

It was an "interesting situation in an interesting place," Sergeant Garshasb said. "I was just doing my job."

The Air Force Sergeant's Association gives the Pitsenbarger Award annually to an Air Force enlisted member for heroic acts, on-or-off duty that save a life or prevent a serious injury

The award will be presented in August during the AFSA national convention in Jacksonville, Fla.

(Courtesy AFPC Public Affairs, Randolph Air Force Base, Texas.)

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