

# Captain Prichard R. Keely, '04

## Named 2010 Jabara Award Recipient STEVEN A. SIMON, '77

**C**aptain Prichard R. Keely, Class of 2004, has been selected to receive the 2010 Colonel James

Jabara Award for Airmanship. Then-First Lieutenant Keely distinguished himself through heroic actions on April 6, 2008, as lead Weapon Systems Officer (WSO) of Dude 17, an F-15E Strike Eagle two-ship during a sortie supporting United States and Afghanistan National Army (ANA) ground forces. The F-15s were tasked to support a Special Operations Force (SOF) mission

to capture or kill a known insurgent leader in the Nuristan province of Afghanistan. The tasking required the F-15s to provide armed escort and over watch for the SOF team's infill and egress of the target. Dude 17 provided armed escort for the three helicopters that carried the SOF troops. Soon after landing and advancing toward the objective, the SOF team began to take heavy fire from more than 200 enemy fighters.

The challenging terrain made the battle even more difficult, as the enemy fighters had the high ground and pinned the friendly forces in the valley below. When the Joint Terminal Attack Controller (JTAC) on the ground was wounded early in the engagement, Lt. Keely recognized the severity of the situation and provided the JTAC with timely situation updates and began to coordinate air strikes to suppress the enemy fire. Lt. Keely took control of the battle space over the next four hours, enabling an effective counter attack. He skillfully coordinated the five AH-64 Apache helicopters, allowing them to positively identify and successfully engage the target. When the JTAC requested two 500-pound GBU-38 Joint Direct Attack Munitions (JDAM) from Lt. Keely's aircraft, he successfully engaged the targets. The attacks suppressed the enemy's fire long enough for ground forces to regroup and better assess the situation.

Needing to refuel, Lt. Keely initiated single-ship refueling operations to provide continuous coverage and sustained mission support over the objective area. While refueling, he was able to maintain battle-space awareness through sensor management and communications with his wingman and the JTAC. After refueling, Dude 17 returned to the scene. Due to the intense battle on the ground, additional air assets arrived to support the endangered ground forces. Lt. Keely deconflicted fixed wing assets while the JTAC simultaneously controlled AH-64 strikes into enemy fighting positions. After



the helicopter strikes, he provided a situation update to two arriving A-10s and then coordinated their attacks.

Lt. Keely's aircraft then experienced a malfunction preventing own-ship weapons employment. Multitasking, he began troubleshooting the malfunction while simultaneously directing his wingman to engage targets. He effectively led his wingman through two 20mm strafe passes, one GBU-12 Laser Guided Bomb, and one GBU-38 attack on multiple enemy fighting positions. All weapons deployments were direct hits.

Despite this counterattack, the enemy was able to regroup and put effective fire on friendly forces. The intense battle on the ground warranted escalation of force to allow the SOF team to escape the area. The JTAC requested Lt. Keely's flight to employ a 2,000 pound GBU-31 JDAM on the enemy's position in the high ground. Through his coordination and awareness of the battlespace, Lt. Keely's wingman was able to rapidly employ the weapon, suppressing the enemy's fire and enabling the friendly forces to posture for extraction. The stunned enemy was no longer able to deter the team's evacuation. Once the SOF team was safely extracted from the area, Lt. Keely provided armed escort for evading and medical evacuation helicopter assets until they returned to their forward operating base.

All in all, Lt. Keely expertly led the expenditure of 5,500 pounds of Precision Guided Munitions and 450 rounds of 20mm during twelve separate attacks against enemy forces. The precise destruction of enemy fighting positions resulted in 40 enemy fighters killed in action and more than 100 wounded. The hard-fought ground battle diminished the enemy's will to fight, leading to the capture of eight insurgents. Most importantly, Lt. Keely's decisive actions saved the lives of 150 US and ANA soldiers and enabled the medical evacuation of ten wounded soldiers.

Captain Keely currently serves as Training Officer and F-15E Weapons Systems Officer Instructor assigned to the 355<sup>th</sup> Fighter Squadron, Seymour Johnson AFB, North Carolina. Prior awards include the 2008 Daedalian Warrior WSO, 2008 355 FS Warrior WSO, and 2009 Instructor WSO of the Third Quarter.

Captain Keely joins an extremely exclusive group, becoming only the forty-ninth Air Force Academy graduate selected for



the Jabara Award. Among the previous winners are such notable alumni as Vietnam War heroes Karl Richter, '64, and Steve Ritchie, '64; pioneering astronaut Karol Bobko, '59; and Hudson River landing pilot Chesley Sullenberger, '73. Established in 1967, the Colonel James Jabara Airmanship Award is presented to a USAFA graduate, living or deceased, whose actions directly associated with an aerospace vehicle set him/her apart from contemporaries. The annual award is jointly presented on behalf of the Academy, the Association of Graduates, and the Jabara family. Colonel James Jabara was the first jet ace and the second leading ace in the Korean War. In 1951, he won the Air Force Association's most prestigious award and in 1957 was recognized as one of the 25 Americans who had contributed the most to aviation. Captain Keely will be presented the 2010 Jabara Award

for Airmanship on May 7, 2010, during the noon meal at Mitchell Hall, and will be feted with a dinner and award reception at Doolittle Hall later that evening.

Captain Keely's exceptional airmanship, dynamic leadership, outstanding initiative, and unparalleled achievements reflect great credit upon himself and the United States Air Force. The Academy, the AOG, and the Jabara family are proud to name Captain Prichard R. Keely the recipient of the 2010 James Jabara Airmanship Award. ✓

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*Lt. Col. (Ret.) Steven A. Simon is the Academy's graduate liaison, working in the Development and Alumni Programs office. In addition to his extensive non-fiction writing, he is the author of two novels, On The Dead Run and Service Before Self.*