

Air Combat Command

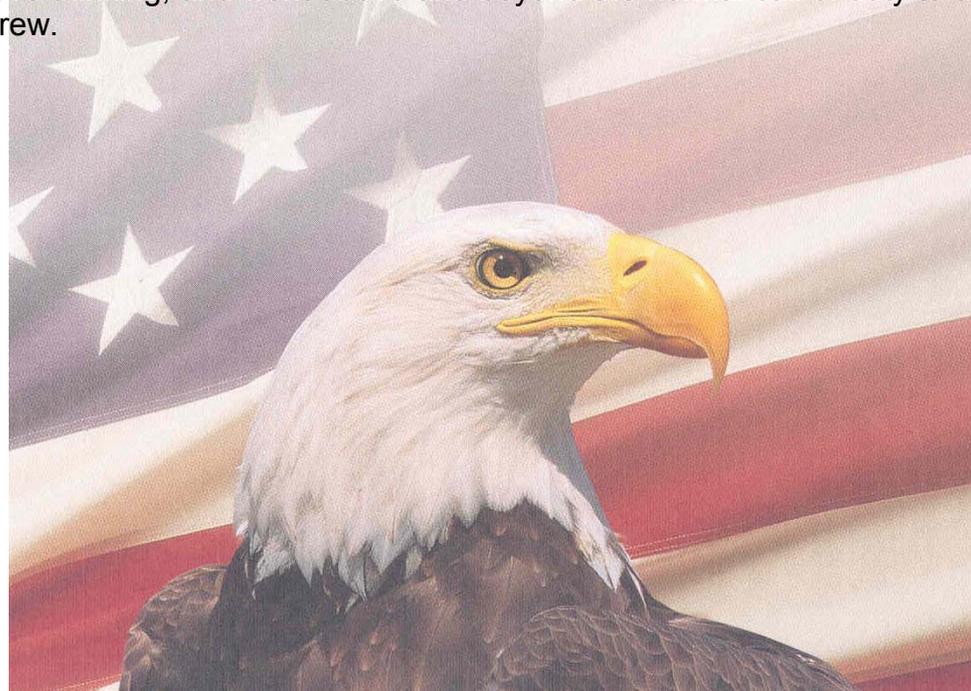
Flightline Safety Award of Distinction

SSGT MARK D. NINO

On Dec. 17, 2001, an HH-60 Blackhawk helicopter was conducting search and rescue operations from a deployed location in support of the air campaign in Afghanistan and enforcing the no-fly zone over Iraq. During an attempted night landing at an undisclosed site, the Blackhawk lurched dramatically to the left. The pilot quickly lifted off again and the on-board crew chief reported the left main landing gear strut was broken and would not support the weight of the helicopter. The pilot declared an in-flight emergency and returned to base where they were met by SSgt Mark Nino's team. Using the resources available to him, SSgt Nino assigned duties to the people at his disposal and ensured those who did not need to be involved were evacuated. If the helicopter could not remain upright during the emergency landing, there was the possibility that the flying rotors could possibly destroy the aircraft, injure, and even kill, by-standers and the aircrew. SSgt Nino used what he had available (i.e., pallets, sandbags, and chocks) to fabricate a platform for the disabled craft to rest on. He even taped glow sticks to the upper surface of the structure to help the pilot see how to line up in the dark for a precise touchdown. The helicopter crew made four unsuccessful attempts to land. After each missed attempt, SSgt Nino's crew had to adjust the height of the supporting material as the aircraft hovered 100 feet above the ground. On the fifth try, the helicopter was down, safe, and stable. SSgt Nino and his crash crew used sound judgment, innovative thinking, and went above and beyond the normal call of duty to avert the loss of the Blackhawk helicopter and possibly its aircrew.



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