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Wednesday, October 22, 2008

Bishop given award for courageous action

Published Thursday, April 24, 2008

By Staff

A Wise County resident has been given the highest award available through the United States Air Force auxiliary Civil Air Patrol (CAP), a volunteer organization that numbers 55,000 adults and young men and women from all 50 states and the two U.S. territories.

Lt. Colonel Thomas W. Bishop, who until recently served as the Group 2 Commander, part of the huge Texas CAP wing, was awarded the Silver Medal of Valor for risking his own life to save a 15-year-old female cadet pilot's life during a tow plane and glider operation at Bishop's airport, located just east of Decatur. Bishop, who has over 33,000 hours of commercial, private, fixed wing, glider, and helicopter time, was flying a tow plane and, right at liftoff for the tow plane and glider, noticed that his own plane was suffering a significant reduction of power, the result of one of the six cylinders of the engine blowing up, and the cockpit was filling with smoke. As the glider was just barely airborne and flown by someone on their first solo flight, Tom had to make a split-second decision: cut the tow rope to ensure he had power to climb out and save himself, which surely would have caused the glider to crash at the low, unrecoverable altitude it had reached, or continue to nurse the tow plane and try to bring the student around to a safe landing.

Bishop nursed the tow plane at reduced power to a safe altitude. He then towed the student's glider across the runway at 90 degrees, and finally positioned the two craft at 600-foot of altitude on a base leg for the approach to landing. When the student was positioned for a safe landing, Tom had the young pilot release the tow rope, and he positioned his tow plane out of the glider's way so the student could land on the initial solo with an unobstructed view of the runway. Bishop then



circled the airport and landed his disabled aircraft past the glider, saving not only the glider pilot's life, but his own.

The Citation to accompany the Silver Medal of Valor states that it was awarded for "conspicuous heroic action at the risk of life above and beyond the call of duty" and was presented to Lt. Col. Bishop by Major General Antonio Pineda, former CAP National Commander. As the citation reads, General Pineda proclaimed "Colonel Bishop's quick thinking, heroic action and willingness to risk his own life to save others, reflects great credit upon himself, the Texas Wing and Civil Air Patrol."

Tom Bishop is an active Wise County citizen, having been involved over the years as a deputy sheriff, an investigator for the county attorney's office, a U.S. customs officer, a chief of police and now a reserve police officer. His love for flying and for teaching young people about aviation has made him a seminal leader in an organization responsible for supporting other U.S. agencies in times of national disasters while influencing the lives of thousands of young Americans.

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940.627.5987 | Fax 940.627.1004 | Email webmaster@wcmessenger.com