

THE UNITED STATES AIR FORCE PRESENTS

# PORTRAITS IN COURAGE

2012



VOLUME VII



# THE CHIEF OF STAFF'S

## PORTRAITS IN COURAGE

As we celebrate the 65th Anniversary of the United States Air Force, we recognize the tremendous achievements and sacrifices made by our Airmen, both past and present. The brave volunteers in our service today, who put themselves into harm's way, continue the Air Force's incredible legacy as the most respected air force in the world.

It is with great pride that we showcase 20 heroic Airmen in this seventh volume of Portraits in Courage. These exceptional Airmen persisted through extraordinary circumstances, confronted unforeseen dangers, and surmounted seemingly impossible challenges, all to accomplish their missions, and often saving the lives of others in the process.

The narratives that follow illustrate the diverse missions that Airmen and the Air Force undertake on behalf of the Nation. They showcase the valor of an Air Force Cross recipient, demonstrate the bravery of Silver and Bronze Star recipients, pay tribute to the sacrifice of Purple Heart recipients, and highlight the courage of Airmen awarded Air Force and Army Combat Action Badges.

The United States continues to be a nation embroiled in protracted conflict, but it is fortunate to have these Airmen and their Joint teammates performing magnificently under the stress of combat and the extreme conditions of humanitarian and disaster relief operations. We hope that as you read these accounts of courage and valor, you come away with a sense of the dedication and sacrifice that has been and will remain the hallmark of the men and women of the United States Air Force.



**NORTON A. SCHWARTZ**  
General, USAF  
Chief of Staff



**JAMES A. ROY**  
Chief Master Sergeant  
of the Air Force



“America was built on courage, on imagination and an unbeatable determination to do the job at hand.”

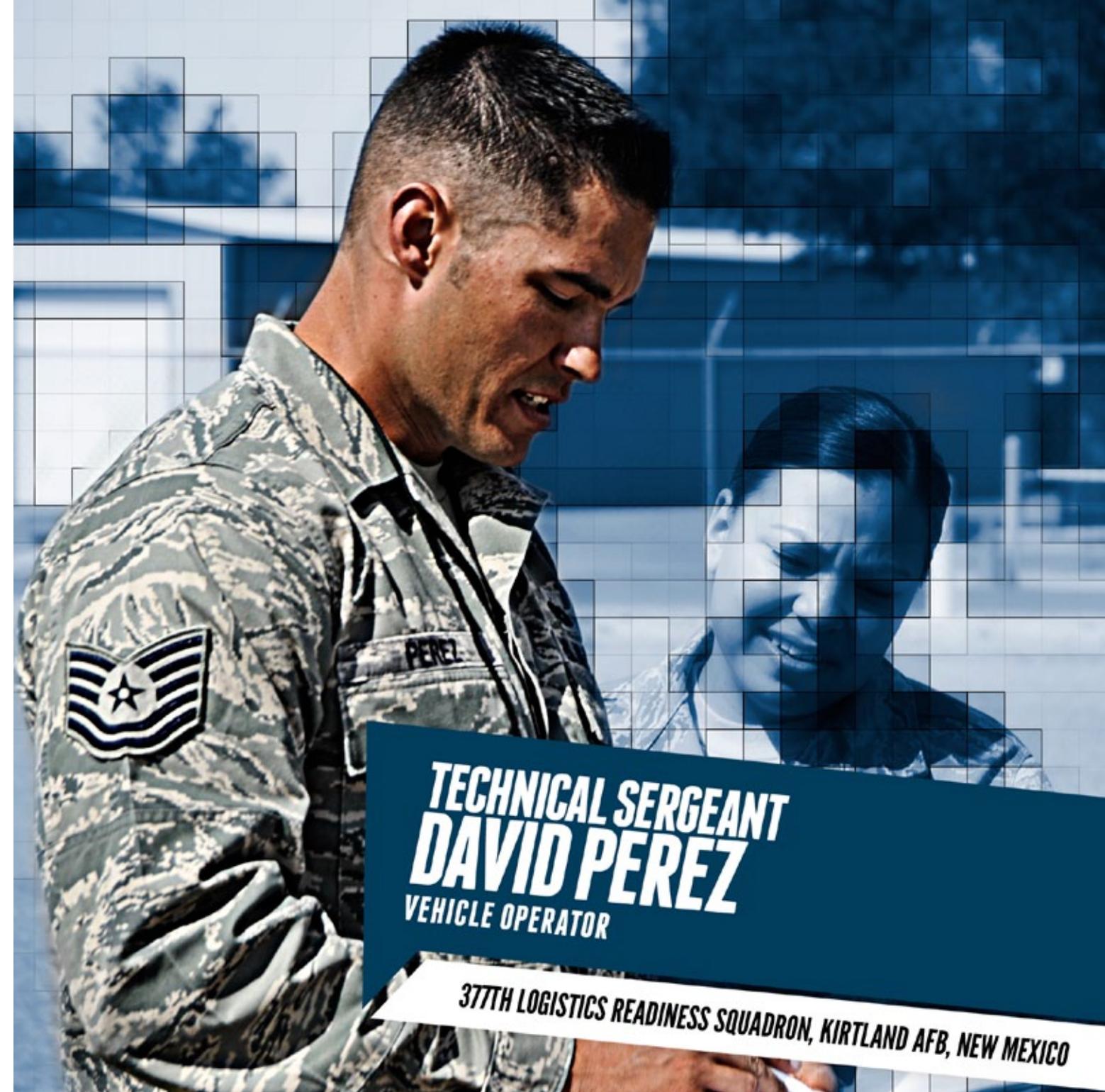
**HARRY S. TRUMAN**

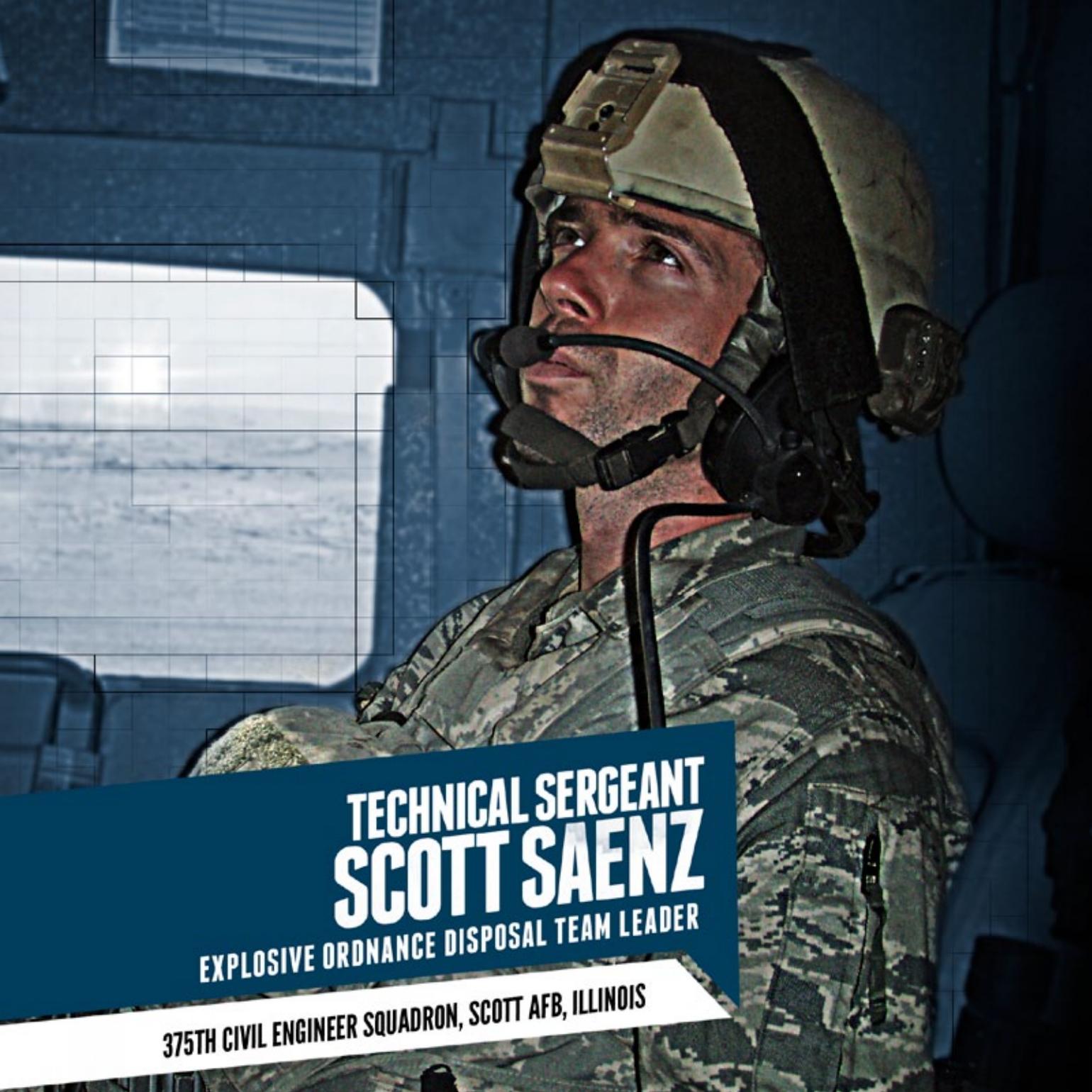
On November 11, 2011, Technical Sergeant **DAVID PEREZ** was the convoy commander for a mission to Kalsu Air Base, Iraq. The convoy had proceeded north past a checkpoint on Main Supply Route Tampa, when the convoy witnessed a horrific, high-speed, head-on collision involving two Iraqi vehicles, each filled with passengers. Both vehicles sustained major damage and burst into flames.

Sergeant Perez quickly directed the convoy to halt. After a quick visual inspection of the surrounding area to ensure the safety and security of his team, he directed them to dismount and render aid. Sergeant Perez and several Soldiers feverishly fought to extinguish the blaze and rescue survivors. After several minutes, they succeeded in putting out the fire and pulled four Iraqi citizens, including two children, to safety. Sergeant Perez and his team immediately rendered first aid to the survivors and continued to extract the bodies of those fatally wounded in the wreckage. As a result of the crash and subsequent fire, 12 Iraqi citizens perished.

Shortly after the crash, Iraqi police and a medical team arrived on scene and Sergeant Perez turned over control to their authority. As he did so, Sergeant Perez noticed that a large crowd was gathering around his men, who were still helping the injured and providing security for the Iraqi police and the convoy. The crowd, while originally concerned and passive, appeared to become increasingly hostile. Sergeant Perez observed several people from the crowd retrieving items from their vehicles and shouting. Recognizing the heightened tensions and potential for violence, he rallied his men and directed them to remount and continue their mission.

Sergeant Perez's composure and quick actions during this intense and dangerous situation ultimately saved four lives without compromising the safety or security of his Airmen. For his actions, he was awarded the Bronze Star.





**TECHNICAL SERGEANT  
SCOTT SAENZ**

**EXPLOSIVE ORDNANCE DISPOSAL TEAM LEADER**

**375TH CIVIL ENGINEER SQUADRON, SCOTT AFB, ILLINOIS**

From May to November 2011, Technical Sergeant **SCOTT SAENZ** was deployed to Afghanistan and served on an explosive ordnance team as part of a Joint tasking with the Marine Corps. While deployed, he contributed to more than 100 route clearance missions resulting in the safety of 18,000 miles of critical supply routes.

On September 23, 2011, while conducting route clearance operations in support of the Marine 2d Combat Engineer Battalion, Sergeant Saenz and two teammates disarmed one improvised explosive device (IED) and conducted post-blast investigations after four IED attacks against their convoy. While completing the fourth investigation, Sergeant Saenz's team leader inadvertently triggered an IED, resulting in catastrophic injuries to both legs and one of his arms. Without concern for his safety, and knowing there had been three previous detonations within 50 meters of the area, Sergeant Saenz rushed through not yet cleared terrain to provide his leader with lifesaving medical care. After applying tourniquets to his team leader's injuries, he coordinated with the security elements on scene to move him to a more suitable site for recovery. Once the team leader was moved, Sergeant Saenz continued to provide tactical field care until the bleeding had stopped.

After being relieved by medical personnel, Sergeant Saenz once again put himself in harm's way as he created a cleared path for inbound medical evacuation aircraft through known IED placement areas, ensuring the safety of recovery personnel. Sergeant Saenz's quick actions that day ultimately saved his team leader's life.

After his fellow Airman was evacuated, Sergeant Saenz assumed team leader responsibilities and returned to the incident site where he collected valuable evidence to submit for biometric exploitation.

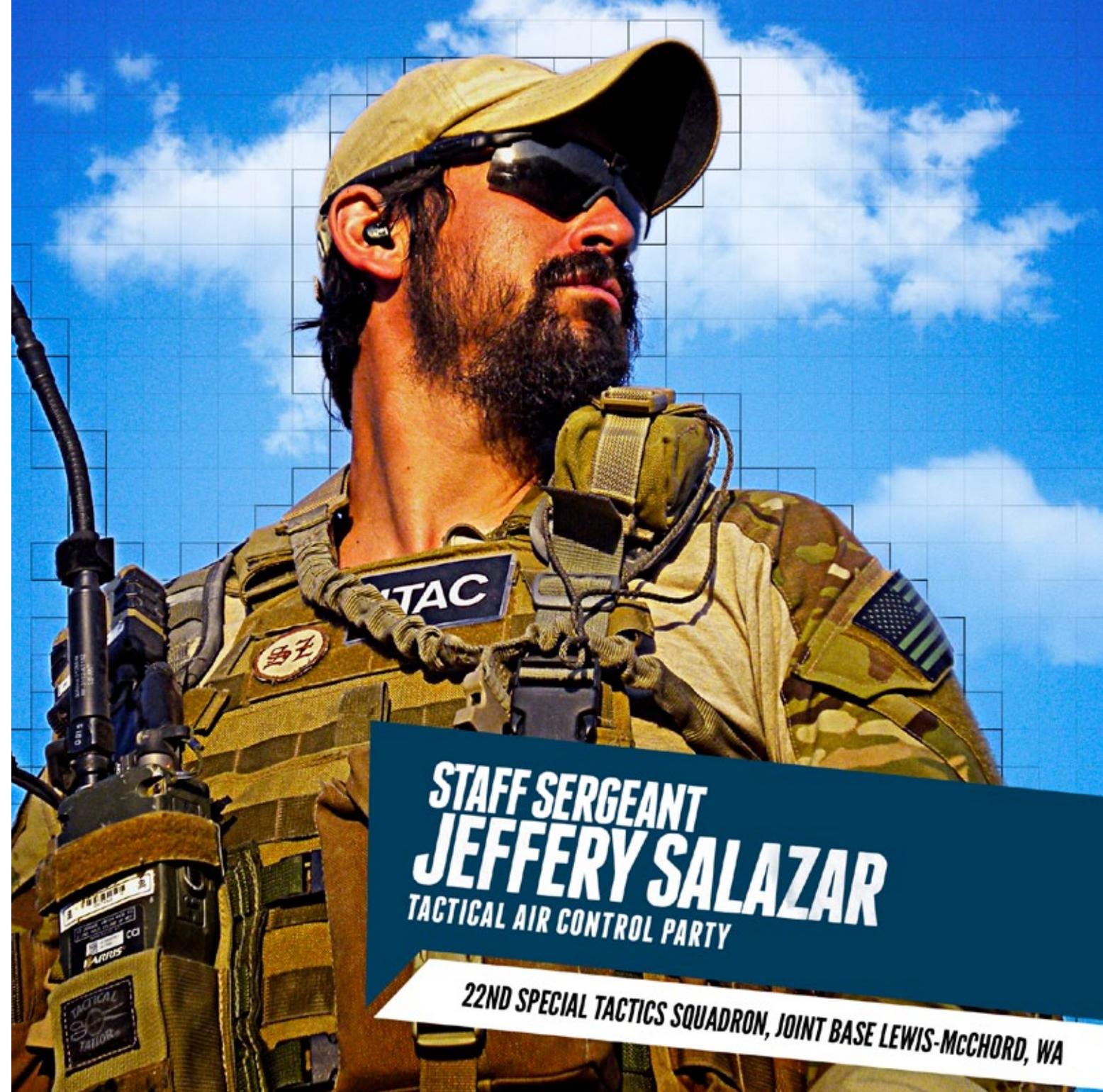
For his courageous action, Sergeant Saenz was awarded the Air Force Commendation Medal with Valor. He was also awarded the Army Commendation Medal for outstanding performance during his six-month deployment, and the Army Achievement Medal for being named "Hero of the Battlefield" in October 2011.

Staff Sergeant **JEFFERY SALAZAR** provided mission critical airpower expertise as a joint terminal attack controller (JTAC) while attached to an Army Special Forces team in the contested Konar Province, Afghanistan from January to July 2011. As the sole JTAC on the team, he planned, coordinated, and executed air support for 37 combat missions. He also controlled “danger-close” fixed and rotary wing air strikes in 15 high-intensity combat engagements with the enemy.

On one combat reconnaissance patrol, Sergeant Salazar and his team split into two maneuver elements to conduct the operation. Within minutes of splitting, Sergeant Salazar’s sister element received enemy fire. As Sergeant Salazar and his element maneuvered into a support-by-fire position, they also began receiving small arms fire from four Taliban fighters. Sergeant Salazar quickly engaged two of the four insurgents with his machine gun. As they pursued the enemy fighters on foot, his element continued to be targeted with sporadic enemy fire. Sergeant Salazar moved within 10 meters of one enemy position where he positively identified and engaged an enemy fighter with his rifle. Suspecting that the enemy was killed, he then shifted his focus to the other enemy fighters, moving closer to confirm that the first enemy fighter was killed. When he was within 15 feet of the presumed dead Taliban fighter, the enemy fighter threw a hand grenade at Sergeant Salazar. Although it landed short, the grenade was still within fragmentation range. Sergeant Salazar was blown off his feet but rapidly regained his composure and reengaged the enemy with his rifle and killed his adversary. Even though the grenade inflicted fragmentation injuries to his knee, Sergeant Salazar fought through the pain during the four-hour engagement until the mission was complete.

At the beginning of the engagement, Sergeant Salazar had requested close air support and subsequently received a flight of two F-16s. After the F-16s checked in, the other element was hit by an improvised explosive device. Sergeant Salazar and his element moved to their location to provide treatment to the injured. He then used the aircraft as an early warning device for any enemy activity to paint a picture of the battlefield for the ground force commander and to aid with the medical evacuation.

Using 17,000 pounds of bombs and an assortment of rockets and guns, Sergeant Salazar’s actions over the course of his deployment resulted in 38 enemies killed in action. For his heroic actions, Sergeant Salazar was awarded the Bronze Star.



**STAFF SERGEANT  
JEFFERY SALAZAR**  
TACTICAL AIR CONTROL PARTY

22ND SPECIAL TACTICS SQUADRON, JOINT BASE LEWIS-McCHORD, WA



**STAFF SERGEANT**  
**VANESSA SALZL BIBB**  
AEROMEDICAL TECHNICIAN

59TH MEDICAL WING, JOINT BASE SAN ANTONIO, TEXAS

In November 2010, Staff Sergeant **VANESSA SALZL BIBB** volunteered to deploy to Zabul Province, Afghanistan, with a Provincial Reconstruction Team as a female engagement team member. She was requested by name to be the immunizations noncommissioned officer in charge for Forwarding Operating Base (FOB) Smart and its four detachments for the main FOB medical element.

On August 28, 2011, FOB Smart was attacked by a small group of insurgents who detonated a 400-pound vehicle borne improvised explosive device, followed by multiple grenades, rocket propelled grenades, and small-arms fire. Just moments after the initial attack, Sergeant Bibb reported to the casualty collection point where she began identifying and treating casualties, including 75 active duty International Security Assistance Force team members. Her quick reactions and calm under fire, facilitated the accurate assessment and treatment of 14 critically-wounded personnel. As a result, all lives were saved.

Later during the same deployment, she volunteered to serve at FOB Bullard in the Shay Joy District, Afghanistan. There, she was assigned as the lead medic assisting special forces personnel conducting counterinsurgency and village stabilization missions. While she was on a mission, the area in which Sergeant Bibb was working came under attack from small arms fire and indirect fire from four 107-millimeter rockets. Sergeant Bibb quickly directed local villagers to take cover, while taking up a defensive position and providing security to 20 local elders and coalition forces members. Several days later, her leadership and quick reactions would once again be tested when a fire broke out inside the sleeping quarters housing 127 Romanian Army personnel. She quickly responded, directing other coalition personnel to evacuate 26 casualties, while simultaneously assisting in extinguishing the fire. Because of her fast thinking, no lives were lost and infrastructure was spared.

Sergeant Bibb's leadership and personal courage in treating Afghan civilians, soldiers, and police, and providing combat casualty care to Joint and coalition force members wounded in action, directly contributed to the success of the International Security Assistance Force.

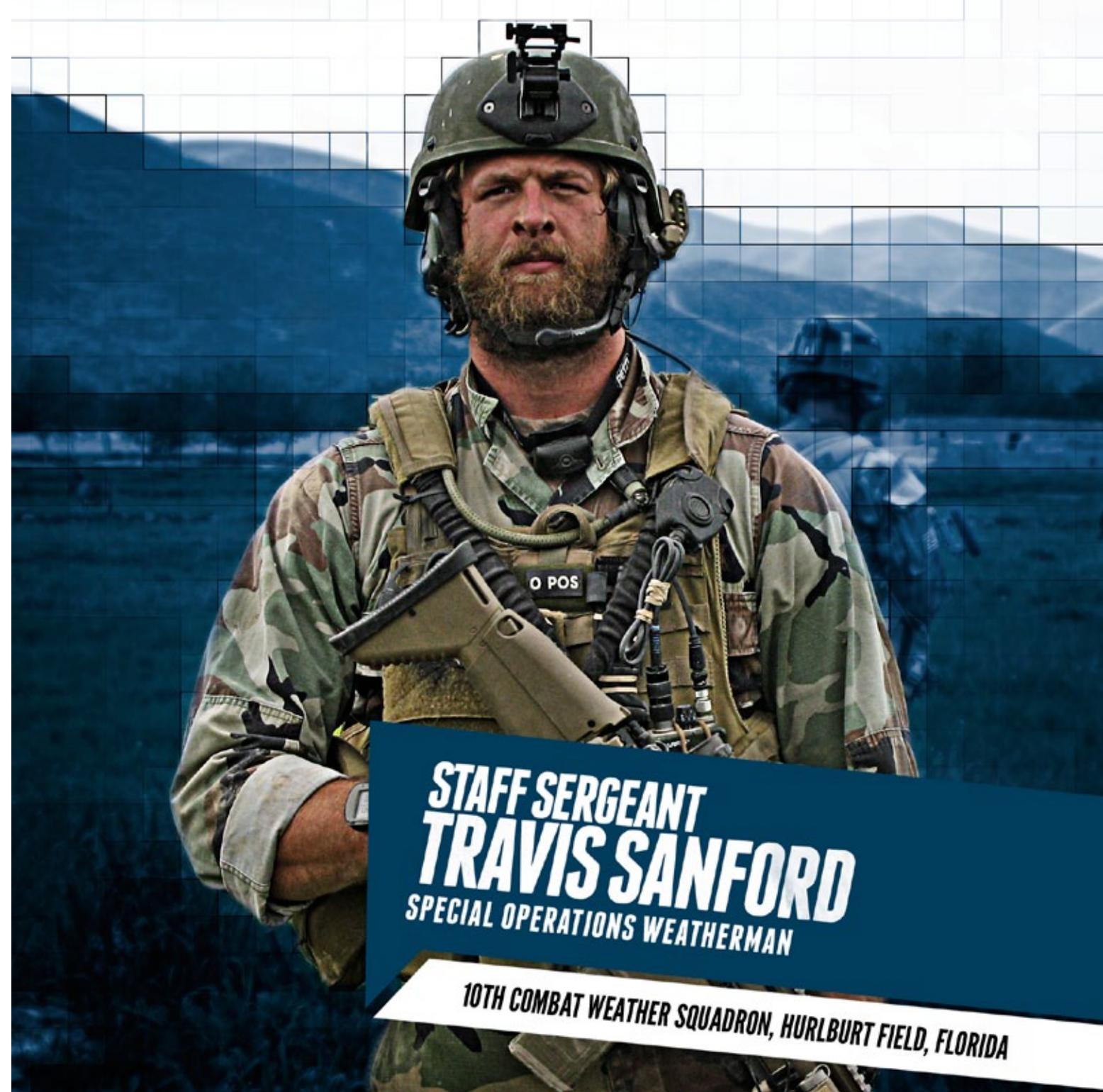
For her distinguished service as a combat medic, Sergeant Bibb was awarded the Army Commendation Medal, the Air Force Achievement Medal, the Army Combat Medical Badge, and the Army Combat Action Badge.

Staff Sergeant **TRAVIS SANFORD**, a special operations weatherman, was deployed to Afghanistan in 2010 as a member of a Marine special operations team. Shortly after midnight on March 8, Sergeant Sanford and his teammates left their forward operating base in a convoy to conduct a routine reconnaissance patrol to disrupt enemy movement. Two hours into the mission, Sergeant Sanford and part of the team moved to a compound south of an Afghan village. Seeing movement and hearing voices, the team established security from positions that overlooked the village. With the aid of night vision equipment, the team was able to quickly quell a firefight just prior to sunrise. However, once the sun came up, more than two dozen insurgents emerged from fortified positions and attacked with continuous machine gun fire, rocket-propelled grenades, and small arms fire.

Manning a M-249 light machine gun, Sergeant Sanford immediately engaged the enemy with suppressive fire. After several minutes of sustained combat as enemy rounds struck their position and whipped over their heads, the team took their first casualty. A Marine near Sergeant Sanford was struck in the head by an enemy round. Without hesitation and despite being exposed to enemy fire, Sergeant Sanford began performing life-saving procedures on the Marine. Sergeant Sanford and another teammate pulled the wounded Marine to cover where Sergeant Sanford and the team's medic continued to administer critical care.

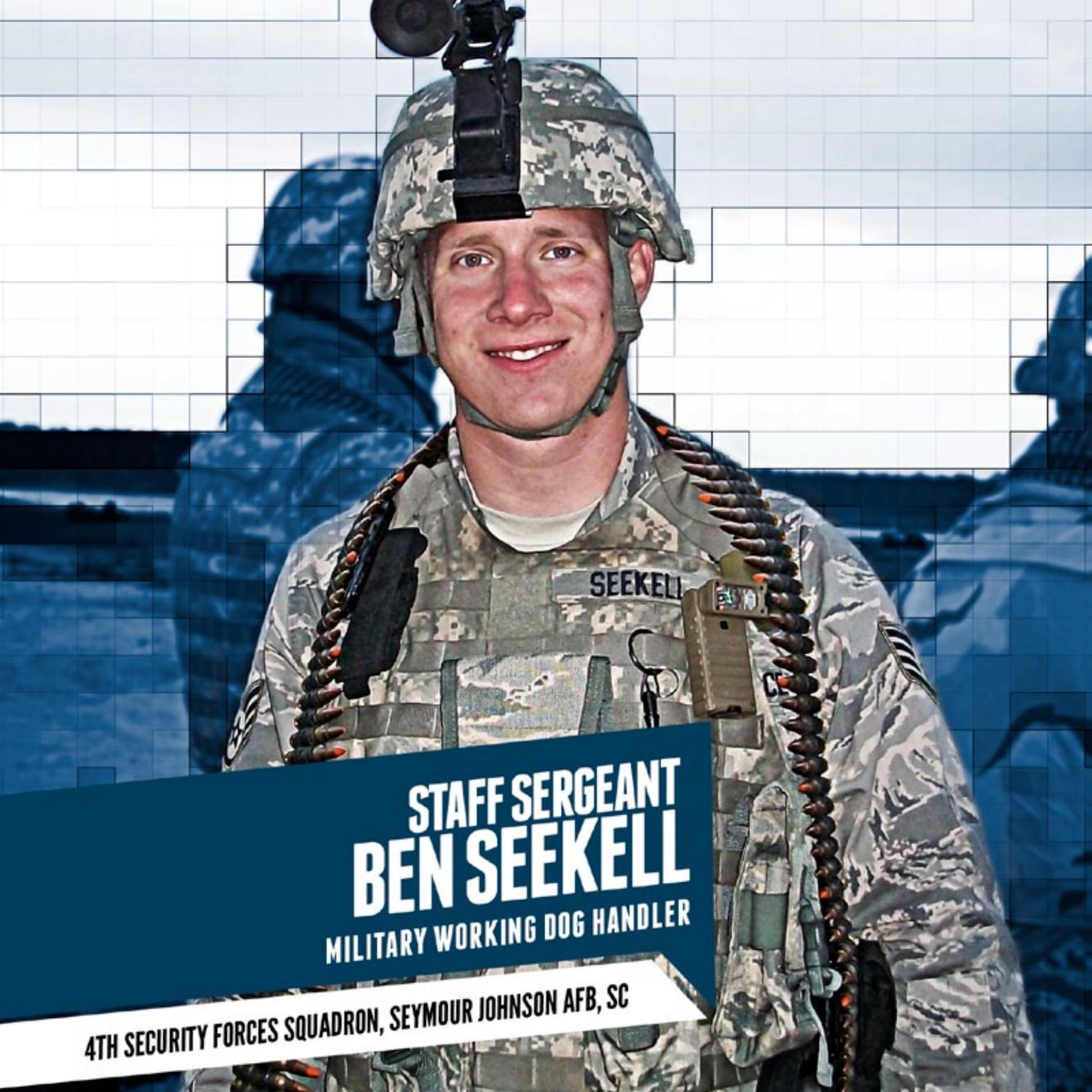
Once the wounded Marine was on a stretcher, Sergeant Sanford carried him 50 yards across an open field so that he could be evacuated. Sergeant Sanford continued to attend to the patient while simultaneously passing weather information to the inbound medical evacuation helicopter. After the patient was transferred to the helicopter, Sergeant Sanford ran back across the field to his team to reengage in the firefight. After nearly four hours of sustained engagement, the team was able to break contact and return to base. Intelligence personnel later reported that multiple combatants were either killed or wounded and several enemy fighting positions and weapons had been destroyed.

For his heroic actions during combat, Sergeant Sanford was awarded the Bronze Star with Valor.



**STAFF SERGEANT  
TRAVIS SANFORD**  
SPECIAL OPERATIONS WEATHERMAN

10TH COMBAT WEATHER SQUADRON, HURLBURT FIELD, FLORIDA



In February 2011, Sergeant **BEN SEEKELL**, and his military working dog, Charlie, deployed to Bagram Airfield, Afghanistan, as part of the 455th Expeditionary Security Forces Squadron.

In the early morning of May 8, 2011, Sergeant Seekell, Charlie and his team were called to perform a security mission outside the airfield. While crossing a gap on their return to the airfield, Sergeant Seekell and Charlie made it only a few steps before the ground below exploded, thrusting them into the air. Not realizing that his own leg was nearly gone, Sergeant Seekell's first reaction was to attend to his team, including Charlie. Charlie had multiple shrapnel wounds to his hind quarters and his ear drums had burst during the explosion.

During a five month recovery at Walter Reed Army Medical Center and Bethesda Naval Hospital, Sergeant Seekell demonstrated superior courage - to heal, defy the odds, and serve his country again in spite of his severe injuries. Sergeant Seekell underwent a total of five surgeries to reduce the risk of infection and determine the ideal length of his residual limb to best support a prosthetic device. Despite extreme pain and pressure, one of the most difficult things he encountered on his road to recovery was assuring his wife and children that he was all right.

He focused on his healing for the Air Force, but more importantly, for his family. Sergeant Seekell's wife, Meagan, and their three small children were by his side during his entire recovery. From the beginning, Sergeant Seekell was determined to return as a fully capable military working dog handler, work with Charlie, and return to the fight. For the next four months, he dedicated four to five hours each day to physical therapy and getting fit for his prosthesis.

This dedication resulted in Sergeant Seekell scoring a 93.5 percent on the Air Force physical fitness test just eight months after losing his leg. Owing to his tenacity in rehabilitation and his drive to rejoin the fight, Sergeant Seekell is once again serving on Active Duty in the Air Force with Charlie by his side. He is truly an inspiration and role model for every wounded warrior.

**4TH SECURITY FORCES SQUADRON, SEYMOUR JOHNSON AFB, SC**

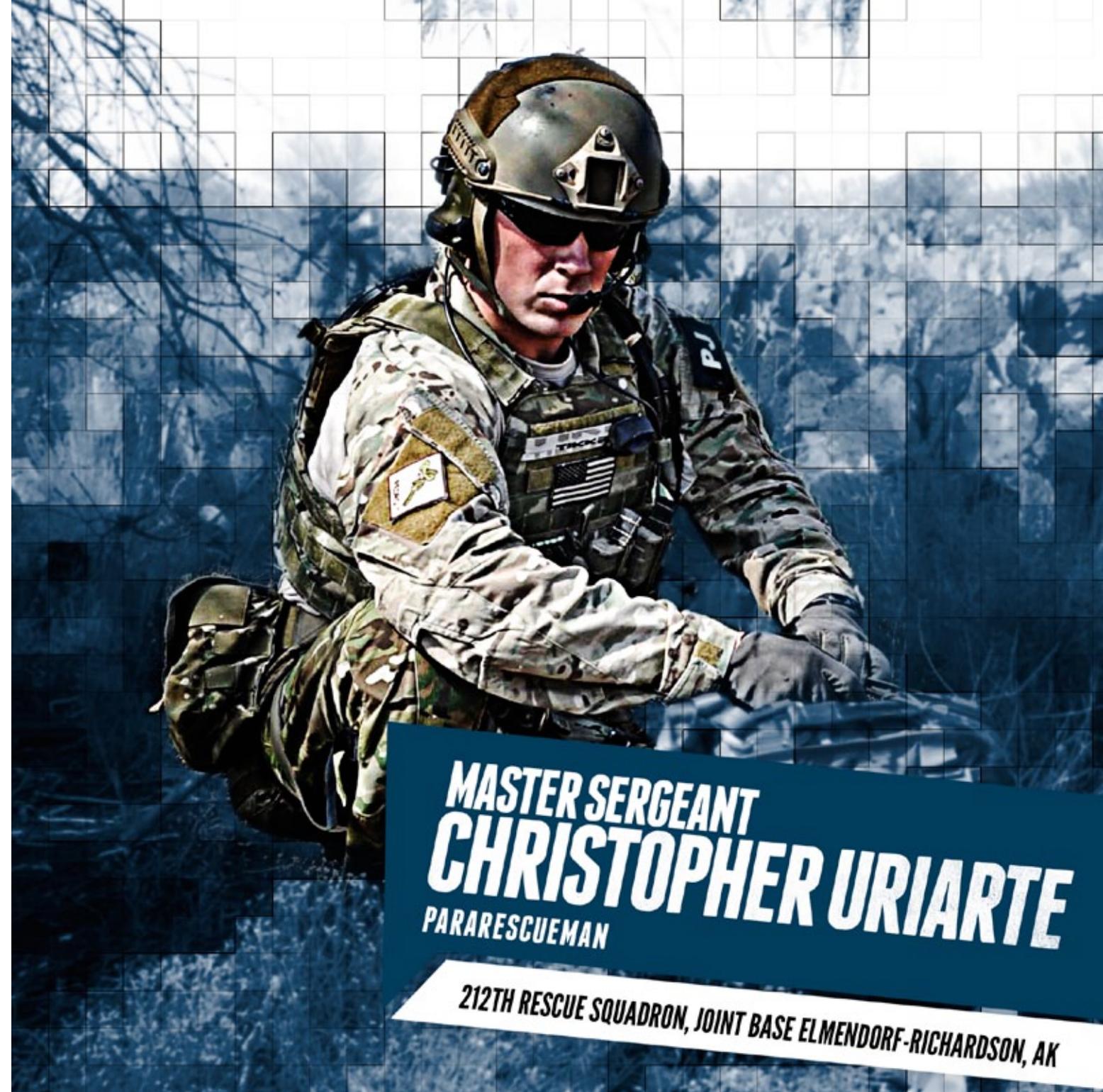
While assigned to Joint Base Elmendorf-Richardson as a pararescueman, over a four-day period in August 2010, Master Sergeant **CHRISTOPHER URIARTE** faced one of his most challenging missions in the Chugach mountain range of Alaska. Sergeant Uriarte's pararescue team was notified that a civilian aircraft carrying five individuals had crashed onto a glacier at 8,500 feet. Unprepared for blizzard conditions, the survivors were in desperate need of assistance. Attempts to airdrop supplies to the survivors were futile due to wind gusts up to 70 miles per hour that blew the bundles of rescue equipment off target.

Sergeant Uriarte and three teammates quickly devised a plan to reach the victims. They requested to be inserted beneath the storm, near the base of the glacier, 3,000 feet beneath and five miles from the crash site.

Aboard an Air Force helicopter, which maneuvered as high up the glacier as the weather permitted, the team prepared to jump. The team successfully landed on the glacier, donned their skis, roped together, turned on their headlamps, and began the trek upwards toward the crash site as the sun set. The team steadily ascended the glacier through the night using special wands to probe the snow to avoid falling into one of the many partially covered crevasses. Although they were weighted down by heavy backpacks and towed two sleds full of medical and rescue equipment, the team trekked as quickly as possible knowing that it was a race against time to rescue the survivors who were enduring harsh conditions and hurricane-force winds.

The team crossed snow bridges and passed beneath hanging ice, stopping only momentarily to hydrate. Each was drenched to the bone from the blizzard conditions which caused frostbite and hypothermia. After nearly 24 hours of non-stop climbing, they finally reached the crash site. Sergeant Uriarte and his team treated the survivors, gave them warm clothes, and awaited airlift. The next day, a U.S. Army UH-60 Black Hawk helicopter attempted to land but crashed onto the glacier approximately 200 meters from the camp. Sergeant Uriarte and his teammates instinctively ran to the wreckage and escorted the shaken aircrew to their makeshift camp. The storm raged for two more days. When it finally subsided, all the crash survivors and Sergeant Uriarte's team were airlifted by helicopter off the glacier.

For his heroic actions during this life-saving mission, Sergeant Uriarte was submitted for the Airman's Medal.



**MASTER SERGEANT**  
**CHRISTOPHER URIARTE**  
**PARARESCUEMAN**

**212TH RESCUE SQUADRON, JOINT BASE ELMENDORF-RICHARDSON, AK**



“I learned that courage was not the absence of fear, but the triumph over it. The brave man is not he who does not feel afraid, but he who conquers that fear.”

**NELSON MANDELA**

On March 2, 2011, Staff Sergeant **TREVOR BREWER** and 14 other security forces Airmen were preparing to depart Frankfurt International Airport on a bus bound for Ramstein Air Base, Germany, to begin their deployment to Afghanistan. As the Airmen were loading the bus, a lone civilian gunman suddenly approached.

After the gunman shot and killed one of Sergeant Brewer's teammates outside, the gunman boarded the bus, killed the bus driver at point-blank range, and then turned his weapon on Sergeant Brewer and his remaining teammates. As the gunman fired four more rounds wounding two other Airmen, Sergeant Brewer managed to capture the gunman's attention, distracting him from carrying out his actions against his next intended target. The gunman then pointed the pistol toward Sergeant Brewer, and pulled the trigger. Miraculously, the weapon malfunctioned—twice. Instinctively, Sergeant Brewer took the offensive and charged the enemy without regard for his own safety, running the shooter off the bus.

Unarmed, Sergeant Brewer chased the shooter for more than 300 meters through the crowded airport terminal. At the top of an escalator, the shooter drew a large knife and turned toward Sergeant Brewer. Undaunted by the danger, Sergeant Brewer moved closer to the knife-wielding assailant, confronting him and preventing his escape so that he could be arrested by armed German police. Sergeant Brewer then returned to the bus to assist with triage of the wounded Airmen and securing of the crime scene.

For his extraordinary courage and decisive actions, Sergeant Brewer was awarded the Airman's Medal by the Air Force Chief of Staff, received the Colonel Billy Jack Carter Award, and was honored with the Federal Republic of Germany's Cross of the Order of Merit. The President of the United States also honored Sergeant Brewer for his heroic actions.





**SENIOR AIRMAN  
VERONICA COX**  
INTELLIGENCE ANALYST

33RD RESCUE SQUADRON, KADENA AIR BASE, JAPAN

In the dark of night on March 14, 2011—three days after a 9.0 magnitude earthquake devastated northeastern Japan—Senior Airman **VERONICA COX** hoisted down 40 feet from a hovering helicopter onto the roof of a senior-care facility in Sanriku-cho and announced in Japanese, “We are U.S. Air Force personnel. We’re here to help.”

As an intelligence analyst who was fluent in Japanese, Airman Cox had volunteered for humanitarian assistance duty and flew on a HH-60G Pavehawk Helicopter with the squadron’s advance command element to the isolated town. During the mission, Airman Cox spotted an emergency message crafted out of piled rocks. Able to discern the Japanese characters, she recommended that the helicopter circle for a closer look, leading to the discovery of 200 isolated Japanese civilians who were sheltered among the rubble. As the only one of her fellow crew members able to communicate in Japanese, she was able to meet with the town elder, and relay precise medical and survival requirements to Japanese disaster response teams.

Airman Cox’s translation assistance during the first 24 hours of around-the-clock rescue operations greatly assisted the integrated Japanese-U.S. disaster response. Over the next six days, Airman Cox flew with nine search and rescue missions, directly enabling the delivery of 3,000 pounds of food, water, clothing, and medical supplies along 120 miles of devastated coastline.

The Emperor of Japan lauded Airman Cox and the aircrew for their service during Japan’s time of crisis. For her exemplary performance, she received the Air Force Commendation Medal and was personally selected as a linguist for the 5th Air Force vice commander during Ministry of Defense-level meetings between U.S. and Japanese senior leaders. She also received recognition and awards from Japan Self-Defense Forces, as well as civilian organizations, including the Japan-American Air Force Goodwill Association.

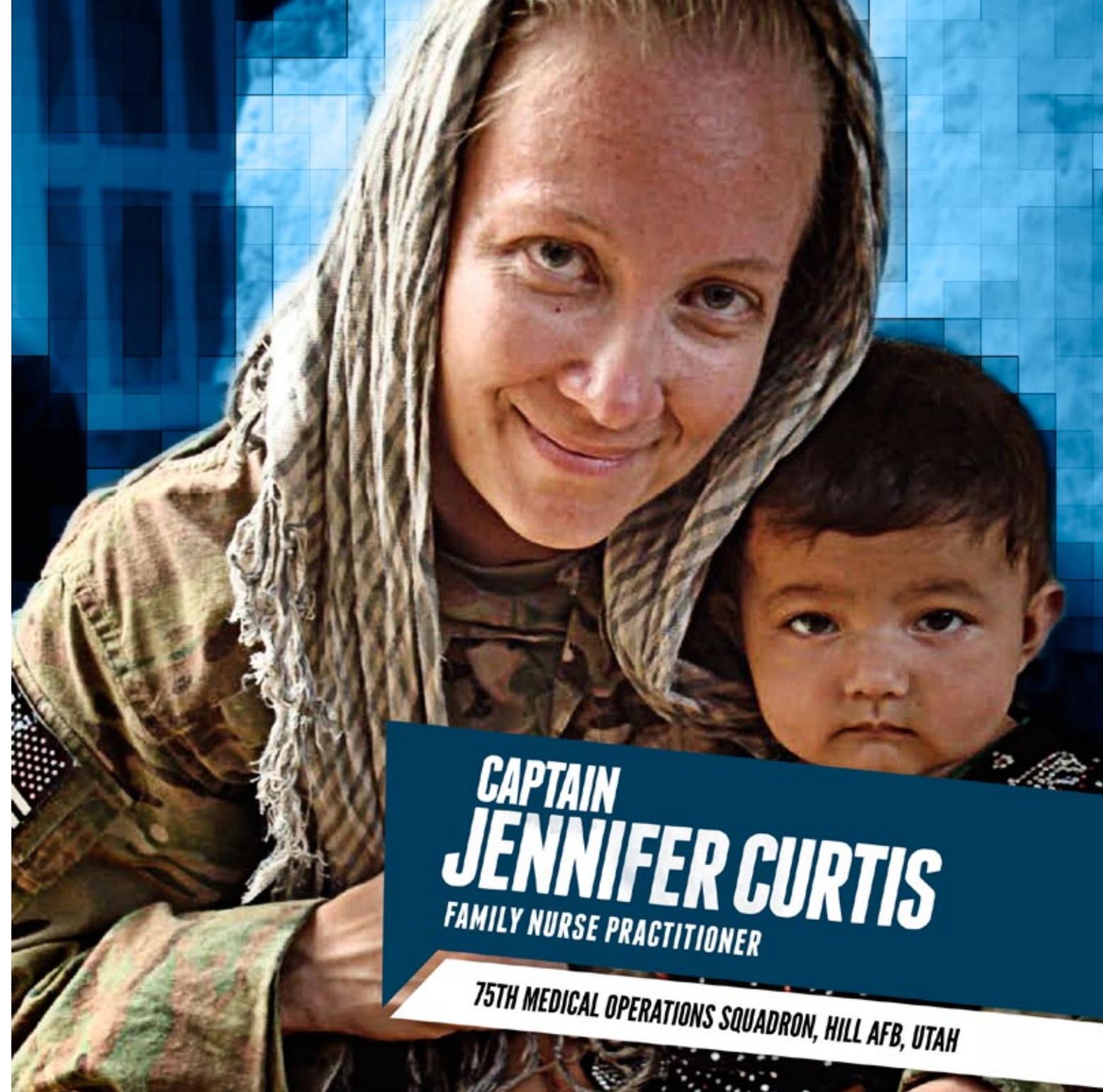
In April 2011, Captain **JENNIFER CURTIS** received a short-notice deployment to Firebase Chamkani, Afghanistan, where she embedded with U.S. Army Special Forces to assist with village stability operations. Captain Curtis quickly realized that her deployment would be dangerous when she first arrived at the firebase located in the mountains on the border of Afghanistan and Pakistan and her helicopter was targeted by mortar rounds. After being on the receiving end of more than 126 mortar rounds over the course of her deployment, Captain Curtis became accustomed to this hazardous way of life.

As the female treatment team provider, assisted only by a medic and interpreter, she travelled to villages and schools to teach local women basic medical care and childbirth. The operation not only provided education, but also built relationships between NATO forces and the local Afghan citizens. While deployed, Captain Curtis developed a series of 11 medical messages that were aired on the local radio station. Their popularity prompted the locals to request that she provide more such messages.

One evening, enemy forces fired rockets at her encampment. Because the camp was on lockdown, Captain Curtis was the only medic available for the first 20 minutes of the attack. She rapidly identified six troops who had shrapnel wounds or had sustained concussions from the blasts and dragged them into the medical facility where she initiated lifesaving medical care until other medics arrived. Once the patients were stabilized, they were evacuated to the trauma center at Bagram Airfield.

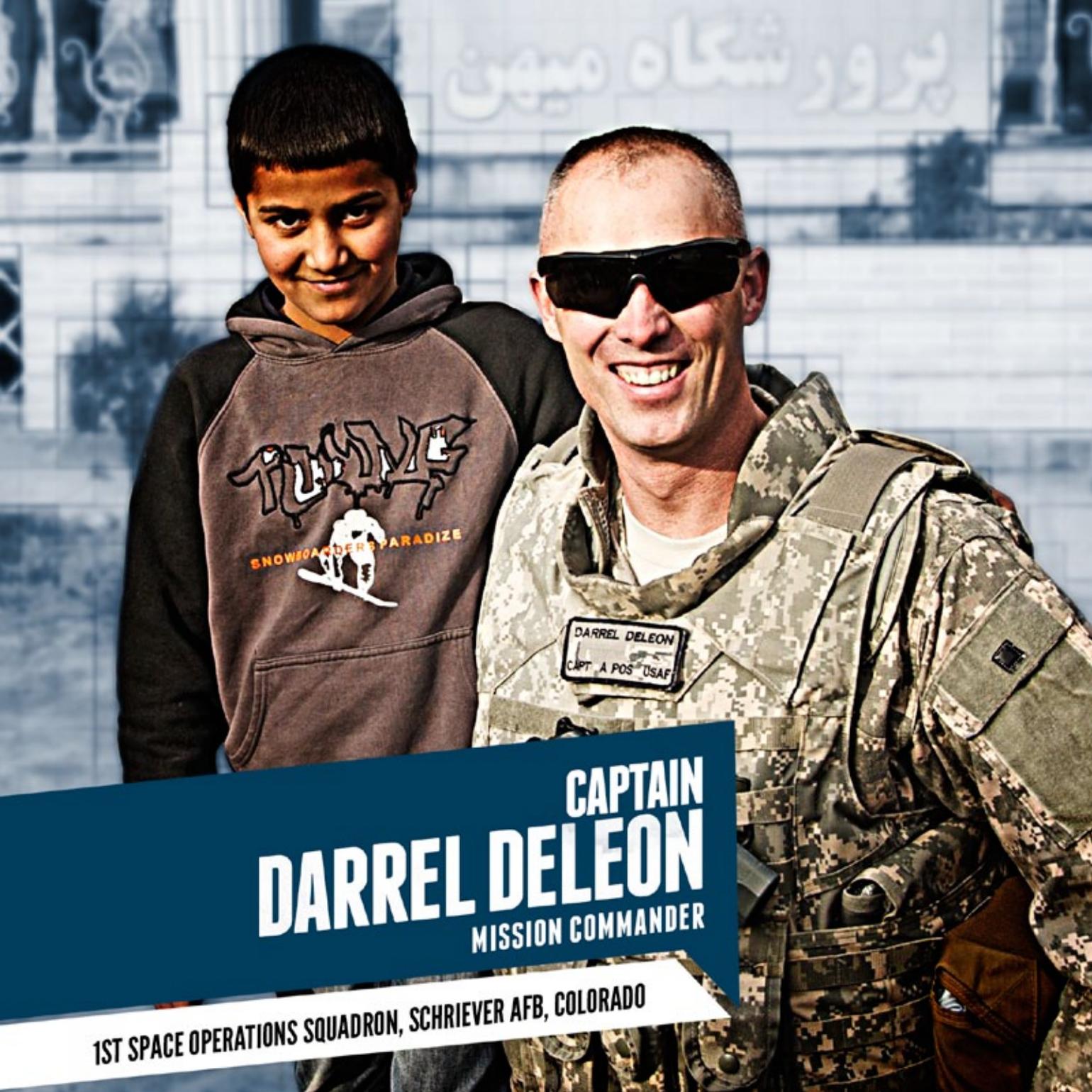
Throughout her deployment, Captain Curtis accompanied Special Forces teams 62 times as they visited Afghan villages. The teams were engaged by small arms fire and rocket-propelled grenades (RPG) during 11 of those missions. In the course of one of these missions, a Soldier sustained shrapnel wounds from a RPG and Captain Curtis swiftly began emergency care to stop the bleeding from his leg. Simultaneously, she was alerted that a local woman was having a heart attack. After performing a quick assessment of the patient, who was with her family on the roadside, Captain Curtis stabilized her and administered care. Even as they were under fire, she continued to provide treatment while the woman's son transported them to the hospital.

Because of her actions during her deployment, Captain Curtis was awarded the Bronze Star and the Air Force Combat Action Medal.



**CAPTAIN  
JENNIFER CURTIS**  
FAMILY NURSE PRACTITIONER

**75TH MEDICAL OPERATIONS SQUADRON, HILL AFB, UTAH**



In October 2010, Captain **DARREL DELEON**, a mission commander in the 1st Space Operations Squadron, deployed to Kabul, Afghanistan as a liaison officer to the headquarters of the International Security Assistance Force. Captain DeLeon was traveling to work on April 2, 2011, when he heard two large explosions coming from the base gate and the unmistakable sound of small arms fire. Following his first impulse to join the fight, he hurried to his office to retrieve ammunition and armor and then ran back toward the gate.

When Captain DeLeon arrived at the scene, he discovered a team of insurgents, including three suicide bombers, attacking Camp Phoenix's west gate. Two of the suicide bombers had detonated explosives, injuring an American Soldier. During the ensuing gunfight, Captain DeLeon, a former 14-year Army medic, noticed that the Soldier injured by the initial explosions was in the open and still vulnerable to enemy fire. He called for suppressive fire and dashed through the line of fire to retrieve the downed Soldier. After removing the Soldier from danger, Captain DeLeon administered first aid and bandaged the Soldier's severely bleeding leg and arm.

After Captain DeLeon treated the injured Soldier, he spotted another injured Soldier in the middle of the firefight, clearly in harm's way. With no regard to his personal safety, Captain DeLeon sprinted to the injured Soldier and dragged him out of the line of fire.

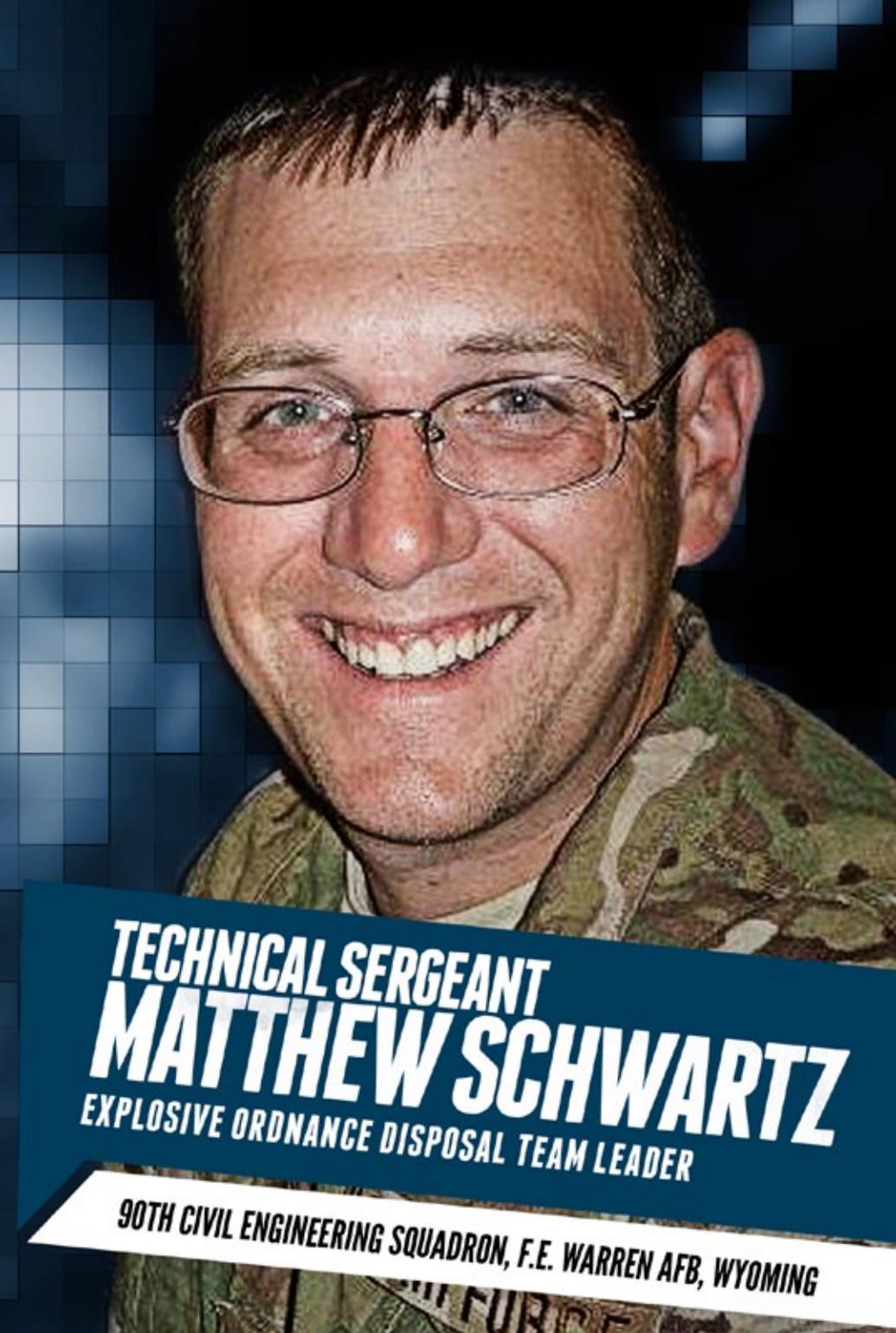
Recognizing that the injured Soldiers needed to be medically evacuated, Captain DeLeon put his life in danger for the third time. He ran across the battlefield to commandeer an all-terrain vehicle into which he placed the injured Soldiers and rushed them to the medical clinic. Returning to the battlefield once more, Captain DeLeon was directed to a third injured Soldier with a severe shrapnel wound. He again provided first aid and transported the Soldier to the clinic for medical attention.

His heroic actions helped save the lives of three U.S. Army Soldiers and suppress an attack on the base. For his bravery that day, Captain DeLeon was awarded the Joint Service Commendation Medal with Valor.

Technical Sergeant **MATTHEW SCHWARTZ** was an explosive ordnance disposal (EOD) team leader embedded with an Army route clearance platoon supporting a Joint combat operation in Afghanistan. The EOD team's mission was to locate and disarm multiple improvised explosive devices (IED) that were planted with the intent to restrict the movement of and defeat friendly forces.

On January 5, 2012, while in the vicinity of Musa Q'alah, Helmand Province, a volatile region of southern Afghanistan, Sergeant Schwartz entered known hostile territory where he located and neutralized two IEDs. He methodically rendered the area safe so that combat operations could continue, ensuring the safety of coalition forces. As he continued to clear a safe path for his teammates, a device targeting Sergeant Schwartz's vehicle detonated. The subsequent explosion left Sergeant Schwartz mortally wounded.

Sergeant Schwartz's meticulous service on the battlefield and his unselfish dedication to duty as an EOD team leader are a true testament to his honor and courage. For his heroic actions on that day, Sergeant Schwartz was posthumously awarded the Bronze Star Medal with Valor, the Purple Heart Medal, and the Meritorious Service Medal.



**TECHNICAL SERGEANT  
MATTHEW SCHWARTZ**  
EXPLOSIVE ORDNANCE DISPOSAL TEAM LEADER

90TH CIVIL ENGINEERING SQUADRON, F.E. WARREN AFB, WYOMING



**MASTER SERGEANT  
KEVIN WALLACE**  
COMBAT PHOTOJOURNALIST

100TH AIR REFUELING WING, RAF MILDENHALL, ENGLAND

On April 3, 2011, while deployed to Afghanistan, Master Sergeant **KEVIN WALLACE** joined a team of U.S. Army scouts to conduct patrol base operations from Outpost Reaper. Their mission would take them further away from the outpost than coalition forces had ever patrolled in the past. Under the cover of night, Sergeant Wallace's team moved on foot toward Kamusari, known insurgent territory.

The next morning, as the team was leaving the village of Kobalion, small arms fire erupted from a two story compound. Sergeant Wallace immediately returned fire with his M-4 rifle while he and the Army scouts took cover in the ruins of a nearby mud-brick structure. Sergeant Wallace and his team continued to engage Taliban fighters as small arms and heavy machine gun fire peppered the scouts' makeshift base. Throughout the unrelenting firefight, with rocket-propelled grenades (RPG) streaking toward the team's position, Sergeant Wallace alternated between engaging the enemy and visually documenting the actions of his teammates with his camera.

Suddenly, an RPG breached Sergeant Wallace's fighting position, throwing him against a wall. He was knocked unconscious and wounded in the neck. Four of his team members were also hit. When he regained consciousness, Sergeant Wallace reengaged the enemy, pinpointing their positions so that his team could accurately fire mortar rounds.

Despite his injuries, Sergeant Wallace left his covered position to investigate a potential casualty evacuation route. Heavy machine gun fire laced the air and ground around him. Undaunted, he verified a safe route, braving fire in the open three separate times to ensure that the enemy had not flanked their element. His actions allowed his team to reach the casualty evacuation site. Although some were wounded, not a single Soldier was killed.

For his actions, Sergeant Wallace received the Joint Service Commendation Medal, the Air Force Combat Action Medal, and the Army Combat Action Badge. He also received the Purple Heart for his injuries sustained during combat.



“In the long history of the world, only a few generations have been granted the role of defending freedom in its hour of maximum danger. I do not shrink from this responsibility - I welcome it.”

**JOHN F. KENNEDY**



**MASTER SERGEANT  
ANGELA BLUE**  
AEROMEDICAL TECHNICIAN

355TH MEDICAL OPS SQUADRON, DAVIS-MONTHAN AFB, ARIZONA

In June 2011, then Technical Sergeant **ANGELA BLUE** deployed to Forward Operating Base (FOB) Sweeney in Shinkai District, Afghanistan, as an aeromedical technician for Provincial Reconstruction Team Zabul. One month into her deployment, the base came under attack and was showered by 80-millimeter mortars, rocket-propelled grenades, and machine gun fire. Sergeant Blue, the lone medic for her 250-man team, received a radio request to report to the Afghan National Army (ANA) side of the compound. Three local nationals had been hit by shrapnel and were in need of assistance. Once on scene and while still under attack, Sergeant Blue triaged the wounded, while she simultaneously directed additional medical care and arranged for medical evacuation (medevac). While Sergeant Blue tended to her patients awaiting medevac, she noticed a patient bleeding from his already bandaged leg. She promptly applied a second tourniquet to stop the bleeding until the medevac arrived. Although the patient later lost his leg, his life was saved due to Sergeant Blue's attentiveness and decisive actions. Toward the end of her deployment, Sergeant Blue and her team were tasked to go on a resupply mission to FOB Atghar. As the team approached the edge of a mountain, the ANA field commander directed several Afghan soldiers to clear the route. Approximately 10 minutes later, there was a loud explosion. An Afghan Humvee transporting four soldiers had triggered a pressure-plate improvised explosive device (IED). Sergeant Blue ran to the Humvee, performed initial triage, and directed the team to treat other casualties with less severe wounds. She immediately tended to the driver who had open fractures to both of his lower legs, severe head injuries, and third-degree burns to his body. Sergeant Blue placed a tourniquet on one leg and instructed a teammate to place one on the other leg. Upon further evaluation, she noticed that the patient's breathing was labored and his vitals were diminishing, so she directed a Romanian medic on the scene to begin intravenous drips. As the patient's vitals improved, Sergeant Blue continued to monitor all four patients until the medevac arrived. Despite their traumatic wounds, all of the Afghan soldiers survived. Three hours after treating casualties from the first IED, the truck in which Sergeant Blue was riding struck another IED. Sergeant Blue sustained combat-related injuries and needed to be medically evacuated herself.

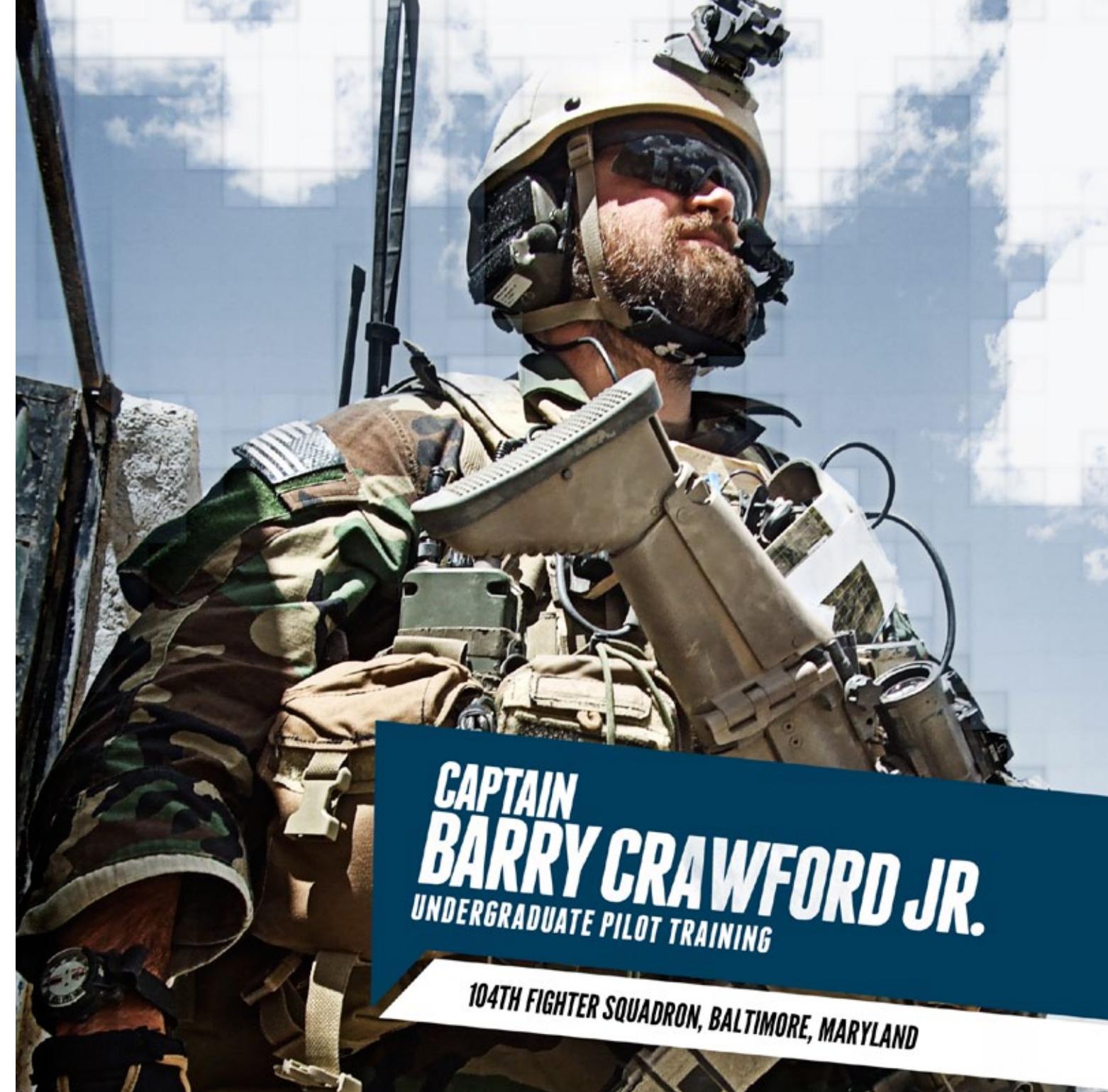
Sergeant Blue was awarded the Air Force Combat Action Medal for her actions while under enemy fire and a Purple Heart for her injuries during combat. Additionally she was awarded the Army Commendation Medal, Army Combat Action Badge, and Army Combat Medical Badge for her actions while deployed.

On May 4, 2010, Captain **BARRY CRAWFORD JR.**, then a special tactics officer assigned to the 23rd Expeditionary Special Tactics Squadron in Afghanistan, and a team of approximately 100 Army Special Forces and Afghan commandos flew into the steep mountains of Laghman Province. When the team landed in darkness, they heard enemy chatter on their radios. Within 30 minutes of landing, they found a substantial weapons cache inside the village. Captain Crawford also received reports that armed enemy forces were maneuvering into fighting position in the high ground.

As soon as the sun came up, the coalition team came under heavy enemy fire from all sides from over 100 fighters. The team was pinned down in the middle of the village and had no choice but to run the gauntlet of enemy fire. Enemy fighters used sniper and machine-gun fire to target the friendly forces, and as insurgent forces closed in, three Afghan commandos were gravely wounded and two others were killed. Recognizing that the wounded Afghan soldiers would die without medical evacuation (medevac), Captain Crawford ran into the open to guide a medevac helicopter to the landing zone. Even though one of his radio antennas was shot off mere inches from his face, without hesitation Captain Crawford ran across the open terrain, engaging enemy positions with his rifle and calling in AH-64 strafe attacks. This allowed the medevac team to move in toward the casualties. As the casualties were being moved, the team was once again pinned down by enemy forces that were threatening the medevac landing zone. Stuck in an open, narrow valley with mountain cliffs around them, the medevac helicopter took small arms fire and was able to depart with only four of the five casualties. With the enemy only 150 meters away at times, Captain Crawford once again called for “danger-close” attacks from AH-64 and F-15E aircraft overhead. In order to mark the enemy locations, he exposed himself to enemy fire by running more into the open and engaged the enemy while directing airstrikes. As a result, the medevac helicopter was able to return and exfiltrate the last casualty. Throughout the harrowing 10 hour fight, Captain Crawford braved effective enemy fire and consciously placed himself at grave risk on four occasions, all while controlling over 33 aircraft and more than 40 airstrikes on a well-trained and prepared enemy force. More than 80 insurgents were killed during the engagement, including three high-ranking enemy commanders.

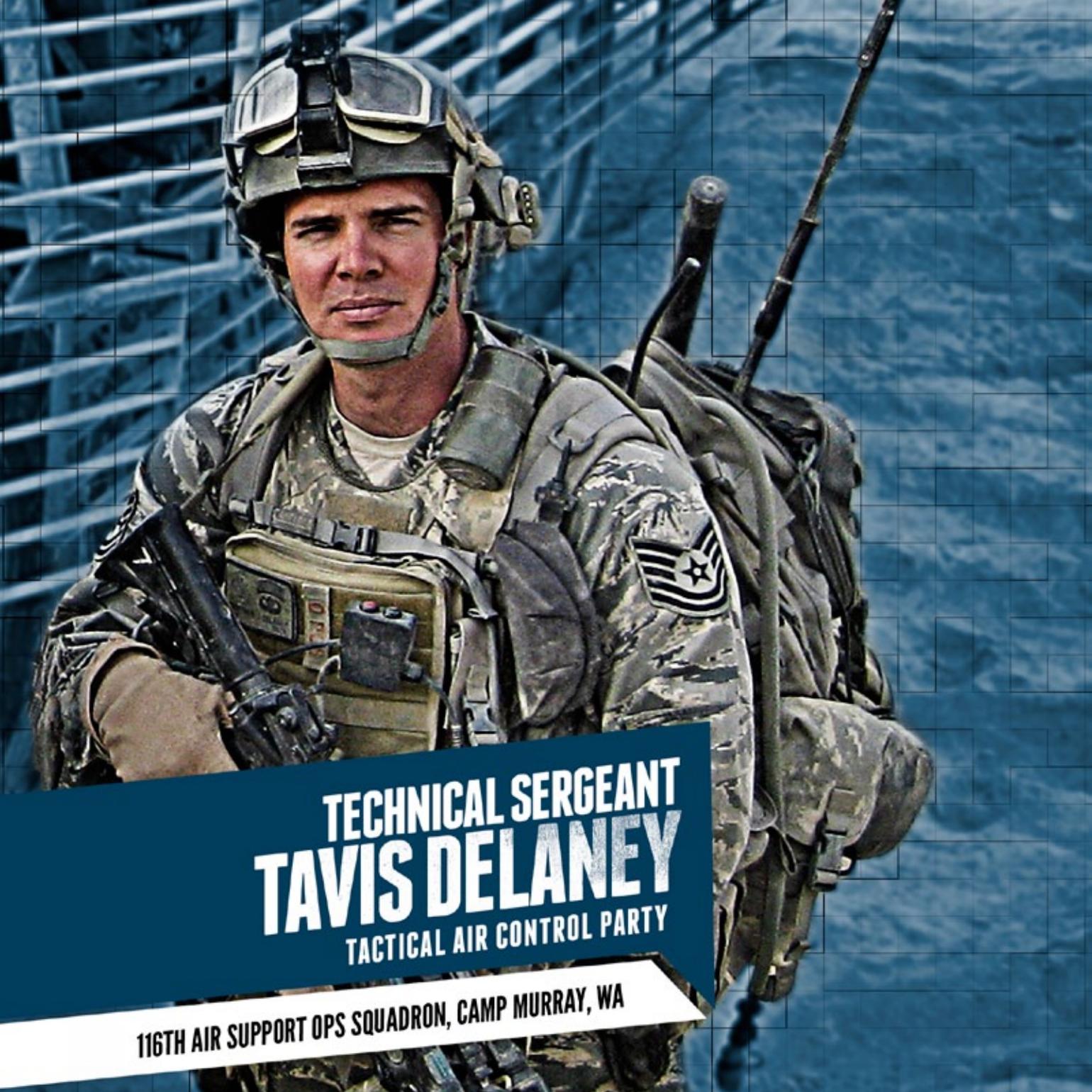
For his brave actions that day, Captain Crawford was awarded the Air Force Cross, the second highest military decoration, behind the Medal of Honor, that can be awarded to an Airman.

\* Captain Crawford was a special tactics officer when this event occurred but is now training to become an Air Force pilot.



**CAPTAIN  
BARRY CRAWFORD JR.**  
UNDERGRADUATE PILOT TRAINING

**104TH FIGHTER SQUADRON, BALTIMORE, MARYLAND**



**TECHNICAL SERGEANT  
TAVIS DELANEY**  
TACTICAL AIR CONTROL PARTY

116TH AIR SUPPORT OPS SQUADRON, CAMP MURRAY, WA

In March 2011, Technical Sergeant **TAVIS DELANEY** deployed to Forward Combat Outpost Kalagush, Laghman Province, Afghanistan, serving as a joint terminal attack controller (JTAC). On the morning of May 25, Sergeant Delaney received less than an hour's notice to prepare himself and his apprentice for an air assault operation into a remote hostile area. Moments after the Airmen inserted themselves into the mountains of Afghanistan, their position came under attack from heavy machine gun fire, rocket-propelled grenades, and mortars. As the scout platoon scrambled to find cover among the rocks, Sergeant Delaney quickly called for close air support.

While he and his team sought reprieve from the intense fire by constantly shifting their positions behind rocks, Sergeant Delaney had trouble directly contacting the first set of fighter aircraft providing close air support. Fortunately, he was able to contact an MC-12 crew who then relayed the ground coordinates to Navy F-18s. The F-18s rapidly engaged and destroyed a Taliban position. After the fighters expended their munitions, Army AH-64 and OH-58 helicopters, along with Air Force F-15s and F-16s, arrived on scene to provide further air support, all working with the embattled JTAC to locate, target, and destroy the Taliban ambush. This concentrated firepower disrupted the enemy attack and enabled the team to reposition.

The fighting then became so fierce and so close that Sergeant Delaney asked and received his commander's permission to drop ordnance within 200 yards, or "danger close." Although two bombs were subsequently dropped, the battle still raged. As the sun began to set nearly 12 hours into the fight, an AC-130 gunship with a combat controller arrived to help the now-exhausted JTAC. Sergeant Delaney and the controller then coordinated efforts to fight a ferocious and entrenched enemy. Over the course of the battle, Sergeant Delaney controlled 14 different airframes from the Air Force, Navy, and Army, and guided 26 strikes on fortified enemy positions in the surrounding ridgelines. Fifteen hours after the ambush began, the enemy force of more than 250 fighters was completely decimated, yet not one American or Afghan military member was significantly injured or killed.

As a result of his courage, heroism, and selfless action under fire, Sergeant Delaney was awarded the Silver Star Medal and Army Combat Action Badge.

As part of Operation ODYSSEY DAWN, on the night of March 21, 2011, Lieutenant Colonel **KARL “BUZZ” INGEMAN** led a two-ship formation of F-16s from Aviano Air Base, Italy, on a mission to aid in the protection of Benghazi from advancing Libyan government forces. Upon arrival in the joint operations area, Colonel Ingeman checked in on their designated frequency and heard the words that no fighter pilot wants to hear: “Mayday! Mayday! Mayday! Chutes in the air!” An F-15E pilot and his weapons systems officer had just ejected from their Strike Eagle before it crashed into the desert of eastern Libya.

After quickly topping their fuel loads from a nearby air-refueling tanker, Colonel Ingeman and his wingman flew inland over hostile territory to the crash site. Upon arrival, Colonel Ingeman took over the scene, relaying updates and coordinates, and informing the downed pilot that help was on the way even as unknown ground forces closed in on the pilot’s position. Then, without regard for his safety, Colonel Ingeman descended to low altitude, the engagement zone of many enemy surface-to-air missile systems, and performed a high-speed “show of force.” He dispensed flares to help him mark the survivor’s location and identify several enemy vehicles that were rapidly closing in on him.

Once he was back at altitude, Colonel Ingeman reassured the downed pilot that he had visual contact on the approaching vehicles with the aid of his night vision goggles and would not allow enemy forces to reach him. Colonel Ingeman then performed a second show of force over the nearest vehicle, dispensing the remainder of his flares and causing the vehicles to move away.

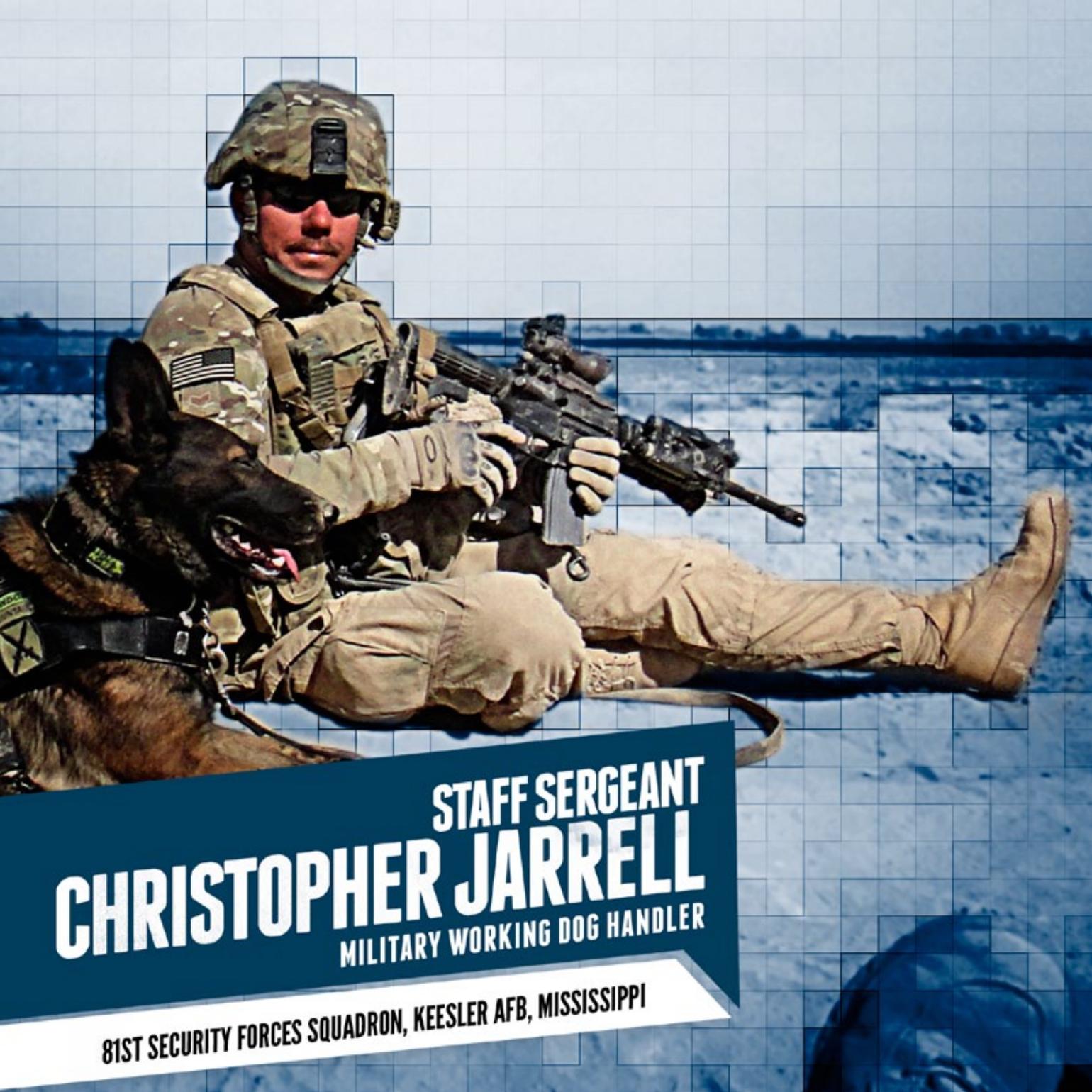
With the immediate threat of hostile ground forces eliminated, Colonel Ingeman resumed overwatch and remained on station well past minimum fuel levels to ensure continuous over flight between on-scene commanders. After he was able to refuel his aircraft, he guided rescue aircraft with the downed pilot aboard in and out of hostile territory.

Through his valorous actions, flight leadership, and tactical prowess, Lieutenant Colonel Ingeman directly aided the rescue and ensured the return of an Airman to safety.



**LIEUTENANT COLONEL  
KARL INGEMAN**  
F-16 PILOT

**555TH FIGHTER SQUADRON, AVIANO AIR BASE, ITALY**



**STAFF SERGEANT  
CHRISTOPHER JARRELL**  
MILITARY WORKING DOG HANDLER

81ST SECURITY FORCES SQUADRON, KEESLER AFB, MISSISSIPPI

On November 21, 2011, while assigned to the U.S. Army 3-71 Cavalry in the village of Rangrazan, Afghanistan, Staff Sergeant **CHRISTOPHER JARRELL**, a military working dog handler, and his Army platoon came under direct fire from an unknown number of Taliban fighters.

Although Sergeant Jarrell and four Soldiers found themselves pinned down by sniper and machine gun fire and separated from the rest of their platoon for approximately 45 minutes during the more than three-hour firefight, they eventually made their way back to the rest of the platoon by conducting tactical bounding movements. Once rejoined with his platoon, Sergeant Jarrell immediately began to provide suppressive fire, allowing other U.S. forces to recover those wounded or killed in action and move back to safety.

As U.S. forces prepared to evacuate the casualties and conduct a hasty retrograde operation, the platoon leader realized that two Army AH-64 Apache helicopters and half of his Soldiers were out of ammunition. To make things worse, the platoon's mine-detection equipment operator did not have the equipment he needed to clear a route because he had been forced to leave it out in the field where he had previously been pinned down. Without hesitation, Sergeant Jarrell stepped up and put his military working dog, Toki, on mine sniffing duties. During their sweep, Sergeant Jarrell and Toki detected and marked a possible improvised explosive device, allowing the platoon to clear a safe area for the establishment of a landing zone for casualty evacuation and resupply operations. Army intelligence later reported that 14 enemy insurgents including the regional commander had been killed in action during the engagement.

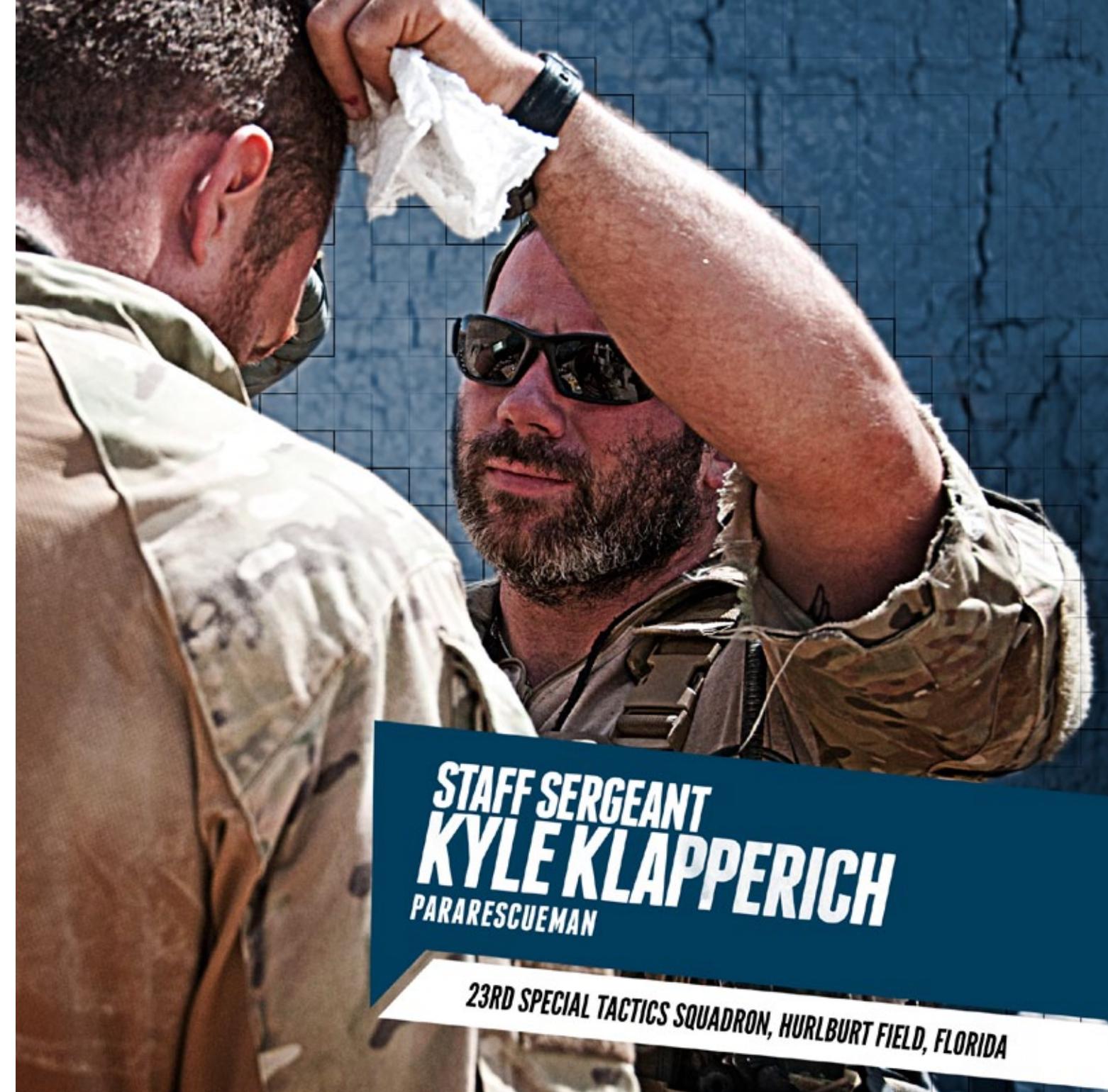
Sergeant Jarrell's courage under fire prevented a precarious situation from deteriorating and directly contributed to the preservation of life of several servicemembers. For his extraordinary actions, dedication to mission accomplishment, and service to his country, Sergeant Jarrell was awarded the Bronze Star Medal, Air Force Combat Action Medal, and Army Combat Action Badge.

Staff Sergeant **KYLE KLAPPERICH**, a pararescueman, deployed in support of Operation ENDURING FREEDOM as the primary rescue specialist and sole medic attached to a combined U.S. Navy SEAL and Afghan Commando Team. On the night of September 7, 2011, Sergeant Klapperich inserted with a combined helo-assault force into a known insurgent stronghold which was full of improvised explosive devices (IEDs). As they moved 200 meters through multiple ditches and ravines, three members of the team were struck by an IED.

Although he had been only five meters away from the explosion, without hesitation, Sergeant Klapperich immediately responded to calls for help from his wounded teammates. With complete disregard for his own safety, he first ran to treat the team interpreter who was peppered with shrapnel wounds. Next, he located an Afghan commando who was critically wounded from a direct blast to his head and had second and third degree burns all over his body. To complicate the situation, the commando was lying in a crater directly on top of an undetonated, pressure plate IED. Sergeant Klapperich ignored the danger and provided first aid to the commando, placing him on his side to prevent him from drowning in his own blood while the explosive ordnance disposal (EOD) technician dismantled the pressure plate. Next, under zero visibility conditions, Sergeant Klapperich felt his way through the minefield to reach the third wounded teammate. Assessing the carnage, he found that the third victim had partial amputations to both legs and his left upper arm and required tourniquets to stop the bleeding.

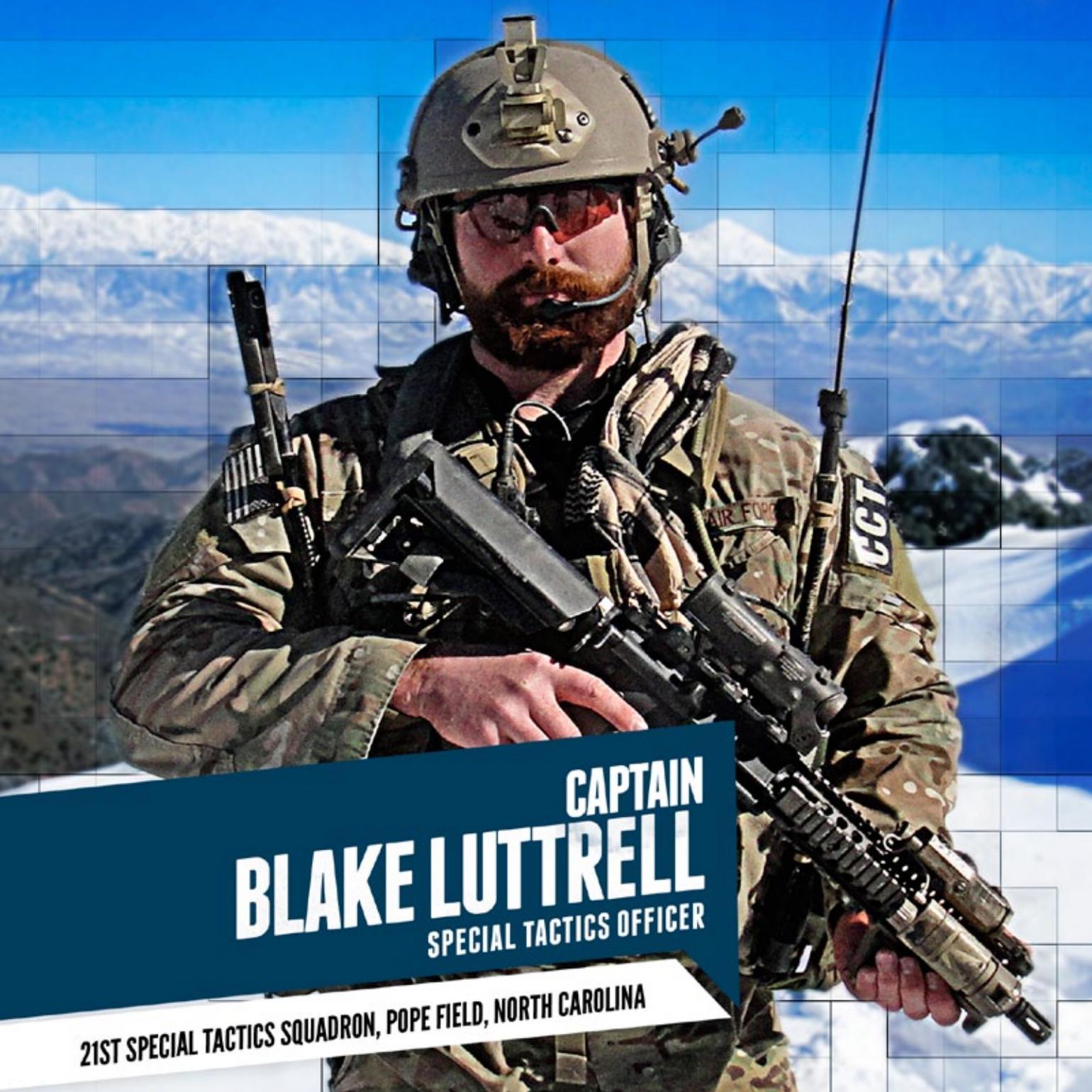
As Sergeant Klapperich was treating the third victim, a second IED detonated 10 meters away causing severe injuries to a Navy EOD technician. Again without pause, Sergeant Klapperich moved across the IED-laden field. Upon reaching him, he determined that the EOD technician had massive eye and facial trauma causing blindness, second and third degree burns, hemorrhaging of his scalp, a broken hand, and burns to his shoulder. Sergeant Klapperich walked his blind teammate out of the minefield to the evacuation helicopter. As this was occurring, three more IEDs were found and dismantled. After evacuating the victims, Sergeant Klapperich and his team engaged in three more close-quarters firefights. All remaining team members returned to base safely.

For his heroic actions in the face of great danger, Sergeant Klapperich was nominated for the Silver Star Medal.



**STAFF SERGEANT  
KYLE KLAPPERICH**  
PARARESCUEMAN

**23RD SPECIAL TACTICS SQUADRON, HURLBURT FIELD, FLORIDA**



**CAPTAIN  
BLAKE LUTTRELL**  
SPECIAL TACTICS OFFICER

21ST SPECIAL TACTICS SQUADRON, POPE FIELD, NORTH CAROLINA

On January 9, 2012, Captain **BLAKE LUTTRELL**, a special tactics officer, and his element were conducting a helicopter assault in Afghanistan to capture a known insurgent and improvised explosive device facilitator. Captain Luttrell's element was ambushed by a battle-hardened group of insurgents located 100 meters away. As Captain Luttrell coordinated Army attack helicopters overhead, two Afghan commandos were fatally shot. Moments later, another Afghan commando received a fatal gunshot wound to the torso. In response, Captain Luttrell and a teammate moved forward to pinpoint the enemy while taking direct, accurate fire.

Captain Luttrell then directed Army AH-64 Apache attack helicopters to suppress the enemy cave complex, which they did with 100 rounds of 30-millimeter shells and four thermobaric hellfire missiles. Captain Luttrell and his element continued to maneuver under hostile fire towards the fortified enemy position, and while clearing a nearby building, his element was attacked by small arms fire from a cave less than five feet away. As one Special Forces Soldier moved around a corner to return fire, he was shot at point-blank range, knocked to the ground, and was subsequently shot again multiple times. Without hesitation, Captain Luttrell aggressively engaged the enemy with his automatic weapon, deployed smoke into the cave entrance, and courageously moved forward despite taking heavy fire. While enemy rounds impacted all around him, he pulled the wounded Soldier from the cave entrance and out of the line of fire.

Captain Luttrell then administered lifesaving treatment to the wounded Soldier by placing tourniquets on both legs. As he conducted first aid, his teammates suppressed the threat, enabling the entire element to maneuver out of the kill zone. Captain Luttrell then coordinated a show of force with attack helicopters and established a helicopter landing zone 200 meters south of the cave to evacuate the wounded Soldier. Once the Soldier was successfully extracted, Captain Luttrell pushed all friendly elements to a safe distance and controlled an Air Force B-1 bomber that dropped a 2,000-pound bomb, destroying the cave and ending the enemy resistance.

Captain Luttrell's terminal attack control measures resulted in the deaths of four enemy fighters. During the entire engagement, Captain Luttrell remained under intense enemy fire; yet, epitomizing true heroics, he never wavered during the heat of battle. For his actions, he was awarded the Silver Star Medal.

“When you’re marching into battle, you look out for the person next to you, or the mission fails. When you’re in the thick of the fight, you rise or fall as one unit, serving one nation, leaving no one behind.”

**PRESIDENT BARACK OBAMA**

## **PORTRAITS IN COURAGE**

is designed and produced by

Air Force Graphics: SAF/AAIM | <https://safmedia.hq.af.mil>

For information regarding Portraits in Courage,  
please contact Air Force Public Affairs, Engagement Division.  
SAF/PAY at DSN: 225-9664 | Commercial: 703.695.9664

THE UNITED STATES AIR FORCE PRESENTS  
**PORTRAITS IN  
COURAGE**  
2012



**VOLUME VII**



Portraits in Courage Website  
[www.af.mil/specials/courage/index.html](http://www.af.mil/specials/courage/index.html)

Facebook  
[www.facebook.com/PortraitsInCourage](http://www.facebook.com/PortraitsInCourage)