



THE UNITED STATES AIR FORCE PRESENTS

# PORTRAITS

*in*

# COURAGE

VOL X

# THE UNITED STATES AIR FORCE

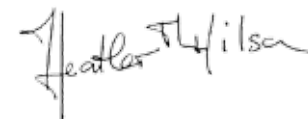
## PORTRAITS IN COURAGE

Since before the founding of our service seventy years ago, American Airmen have been breaking barriers and have been heroes. Our story centers around Airmen risking their lives while overcoming tremendous adversity. Consider Capt. Eddie Rickenbacker jousting in the sky against enemy pilots in World War I while surviving more than a hundred brushes with death. Or, fast forward to World War II and recall bomber crewmembers like Staff Sergeant Archibald Mathies who courageously flew over enemy territory, who like many others, gave the last full measure and never came home. And let us remember Capt. Lance Sijan who earned the Medal of Honor while fiercely resisting his North Vietnamese captors – an inspiration to his fellow prisoners. These Airmen are our legacy and embody who we are as an Air Force.

This tenth edition of Portraits in Courage highlights today's incredible Airmen who are following in the footsteps of these giants, demonstrating extraordinary acts of courage both in combat and within their communities. In this edition, you'll read about Airmen who faced overwhelming danger, exemplifying service before self. They were driven by their sense of mission and a desire to serve and protect lives.

Some of the stories here will sound familiar. The names and faces have changed, but the legacy of selfless acts of courage is well demonstrated in the annals of Air Force history. Today's generation of American Airmen – your friends, neighbors, and family members – are continuing that legacy.

We take great pride in these everyday heroes. Each Airman demonstrated through their actions that our core values of integrity, service and excellence were intrinsic to their very nature. We believe these stories will inspire you and demonstrate that your United States Air Force, 70 years after its birth, is still made up of America's finest.



**HEATHER WILSON**  
Secretary of the Air Force



**DAVID L. GOLDFEIN**  
General, USAF  
Chief of Staff



**KALETH O. WRIGHT**  
Chief Master Sergeant of the Air Force

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# **COURAGE** *in* **FLIGHT**

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The Air Force's 70-year history is an ongoing story of courage in air and space. Air Force pilots have jostled with enemy aircraft in the skies, willingly flown into withering fire, and taken constant risks in delivering the capabilities our nation needs. Today's Air Force aviators continue that proud tradition of securing the skies while delivering overwhelming fire against our enemies.

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## CAPTAIN **JAMIE LEMIEUX**

B-52 AIRCRAFT COMMANDER

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On the morning of Nov. 5, 2016, while providing armed overwatch during the initial stages of the battle of Mosul, Iraq, **Capt. Jamie Lemieux** and his B-52H crew were diverted to support a nearby combat search and rescue event.

Lemieux was informed by an Air Force combat controller and another special operations Joint Terminal Attack Controller that an Iraqi Special Forces team and two American journalists embedded with the unit, were under heavy fire from ISIS fighters. The situation was declared a Combat Search and Rescue (CSAR) event to allow rescue personnel to recover the two American civilians and wounded members of the Iraqi team.

Lemieux directed his Weapon Systems Officer to direct the aircraft's advanced targeting pod to the coordinates. They also began searching for any hostile actions toward the friendly forces and civilians.

The combat controller reported ISIS fighters were gathering in a nearby building with the intent to kill or capture the two American civilians and any Iraqi forces. The combat controller, fearing the imminent capture of friendly forces and the two Americans, requested the immediate destruction of the building housing the ISIS fighters.

Lemieux conducted an immediate strike using a precision guided munition. The strike destroyed both the building and the ISIS fighters inside while causing no damage to nearby friendly forces.

Immediately after impact, CSAR forces were able to rescue the two American civilians and the wounded Iraqi special forces. After 28 hours of being trapped and facing death or imminent capture, the Iraqi Special Forces team and two Americans were rescued from their austere location within Mosul.

Lemieux's decisive and deliberate actions saved the lives of two American civilians and their Iraqi escorts while his leadership led to the neutralization of eight enemy fighters. During the deployment, Lemieux completed 22 combat missions in the defense of Iraq and Syria from ISIS dropping more than 134 precision guided munitions, which resulted in the destruction of 72 enemy targets with 48 confirmed enemies killed.

Before dawn on July 3, 2016, **Capt. Dustin Smail** led a team of two F-16s into northern Syria near the city of Manbij to provide close air support for ground forces combating ISIS.

He was asked to monitor a suspicious, armed individual that a pair of A-10 pilots had been tracking near friendly forces. After the A-10s departed, Smail saw rocket propelled grenades and small arms fire flashing in the night.

He found a large group of ISIS fighters converging on a friendly location attacking with machine guns, RPGs and grenades. The ground forces were outnumbered and overwhelmed by enemy fire, and unable to maneuver away from the threat.

A joint terminal attack controller requested immediate support and approved a danger close attack. Realizing the enemy was much too close to friendly forces to strike the target with bombs, Smail planned night strafe attacks to force the ISIS fighters to retreat. With dawn approaching and the barrage of gunfire and explosions impairing his night vision goggles and heads up display, Smail was unable to visually see the ground or the target during the attack and had to trust his wingman's mark as his only reference.

Smail took off his goggles and prepared to undertake an extremely complex attack with poor visual cues that would put him into the heart of enemy surface-to-air fire. He directed his wingman to call in corrections to his strafe passes while coordinating for a nearby Predator to strike the same position with a Hellfire missile.

During his first pass, Smail's attack suppressed enemy fire. The second strafe factored in his wingman's corrections and hit the ISIS position. The combined effects of his attack and the Hellfire strike from the Predator forced the enemy to retreat. Friendly forces were able to fall back to a safer position.

While tracking the retreating enemy, Captain Smail found 15 additional ISIS fighters who met up with retreating forces and maneuvered to flank the new friendly position. Realizing friendly forces would be overrun if attacked by so many fighters, Smail's formation quickly performed two airstrikes that killed several ISIS ground troops and forced their retreat to a nearby village. Because of the timely actions of Smail and his wingman, friendly forces were able to escape without suffering any losses.

Captain Smail conducted a total of 68 missions during this six-month deployment and received three Air Medals for his actions.



**CAPTAIN DUSTIN SMAIL**

**F-16 PILOT**



## **SPOOKY 43**

### **AC-130U CREW**

MAJOR **ALEXANDER HILL**  
**AIRCRAFT COMMANDER**

MAJOR **AARON HALL**  
**FIRE CONTROL OFFICER**

CAPTAIN **GARRETT ROBINSON**  
**AC-130U PILOT**

1ST LT. **ZACHARY HANLEY**  
**NAVIGATOR**

1ST LT. **MARSHALL SHEFLER**  
**ELECTRONIC WARFARE OFFICER**

STAFF SGT. **WILLIAM CODY**  
**FLIGHT ENGINEER**

STAFF SGT. **FREDDIE COFFEE**  
**SENSOR OPERATOR**

STAFF SGT. **CODY FLORA**  
**SPECIAL MISSIONS AVIATOR**

STAFF SGT. **DAVID KERNS JR.**  
**DIRECT SUPPORT OPERATOR**

STAFF SGT. **TIMOTHY LEWIS**  
**SPECIAL MISSIONS AVIATOR**

STAFF SGT. **ALEXANDER SKIDGEL**  
**SPECIAL MISSIONS AVIATOR**

SENIOR AIRMAN **KELLEN LLOYD**  
**SPECIAL MISSIONS AVIATOR**

SENIOR AIRMAN **JONATHON RUSSELL**  
**SENSOR OPERATOR**

AIRMAN 1ST CLASS **RAYMOND BOURNE**  
**SPECIAL MISSIONS AVIATOR**

On Nov. 2, 2016, fourteen AC-130U Gunship crewmembers provided close air support to a U.S. Special Forces team and 43 Afghan soldiers, near Kunduz, Afghanistan. As the ground force advanced on a compound, they were caught in a deadly ambush. Surrounded by a large enemy force armed with small arms, heavy machine guns and grenades fighting from multiple defensive fighting positions, friendly forces sustained 16 casualties in the opening moments of battle.

As the enemy rapidly converged on the crippled friendly forces, the combat controller urgently cleared the gunship crew to engage within ten meters of injured friendly forces, attacking massing insurgents and structures. As a result, U.S. Special Forces were able to clear their wounded from the immediate kill zone. The ambush persisted as friendly forces attempted withdrawal. The aircrew conducted 19 danger close attacks, consistently placing lethal fires to within ten meters of the severely wounded and outgunned friendly force. The firepower necessary to deter the enemy required the crew to exceed cooling requirements on the 105 mm Howitzer cannon, risking potential detonation inside the aircraft. The crew managed the temperature of the Howitzer while continuing the firefight with the 40 mm cannon, despite multiple weapon malfunctions. Expert coordination enabled the crew to manually fire rounds to defeat the enemy.

The AC-130U expended all point-detonate fused 105-mm rounds, and only eight airburst fused rounds remained. This munition is designed to be employed on personnel in open areas, hundreds of meters from friendly forces. With an enemy element closing fast, the crew stabilized the aircraft and fired the airburst round an unprecedented 12 meters from friendly forces, annihilating the insurgents with a solitary shot. During the battle, the aircrew facilitated additional fire support from AH-64 Apache helicopters, prepared medical helicopters to evacuate casualties, and launched a Quick Reaction Force to help evacuate the ground force from the city. Then, with minimal ammunition and fuel, the team led a dissimilar formation engagement between AC-130U and AH-64 assets to amplify damage on the enemy.

The AC-130U gunship crew's persistent fire support, presence of mind, and courage during two hours of intense combat ultimately saved 50 lives. The crew was awarded the MacKay Trophy for the most meritorious flight of the year by an Air Force aircrew. In addition, five crewmembers were nominated for a Distinguished Flying Cross with Valor while the remaining crewmembers were submitted for Air Medals with Valor.



# **COURAGE** *under* **FIRE**

The world's greatest air and space force also relies on heroes on the ground. These heroic Airmen brought the fight to the enemy while providing lifesaving care to the wounded. They tuned out the explosions and machine gun fire and focused on defeating the enemies around them, serving as America's eyes and ears on the ground in the world's most dangerous locations. At great risk to themselves, they ensured airpower was directed to where it was most needed.



One night in October 2016, **Staff Sgt. Chris Brooks** as part of a Joint Special Operations Task Force in Afghanistan conducted a time-sensitive raid in pursuit of a high-value target.

During maneuvers to block the target's escape routes, the assault force was caught in a complex ambush from elevated fighting positions. Under fire, Brooks quickly used aircraft sensors to identify and mark the threats.

The assault force gained a foothold using rooftop fighting positions, but three of their members were wounded and another killed. Brooks maneuvered toward the casualty collection point to prepare for immediate evacuation of the wounded team members.

Brooks then called in fires from an AC-130 gunship. Moments later, aircraft sensors under his control identified additional enemy forces moving into position to attack his task force. Brooks directed his assault force to fall back and take cover before calling in a danger close fire mission from the AC-130 gunship that used its cannon on the relentless enemy.

Next, helicopter pilots could not identify the landing zone to medically evacuate the wounded, Brooks risked enemy fire to mark the hot landing zone and evacuate his injured teammates to safety.

Following the casualty evacuation, the assault force began withdrawing from the area. Brooks continued directing sensors providing overwatch. When additional enemy forces moved toward the team, Brooks again called in fires from the gunship, which enabled the team to safely depart the area.

The airpower he directed, with little regard for his personal safety, eliminated enemy forces with no collateral damage. Brooks was submitted for a Joint Service Commendation Medal with Valor for his courageous actions.



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**STAFF SGT. CHRISTOPHER BROOKS**  
TACTICAL AIR CONTROL PARTY AIRMAN

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**MASTER SGT. AARON FREDERICK**  
TACTICAL SECURITY ELEMENT TEAM LEADER

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On Dec. 21, 2015, **Master Sgt. Aaron Frederick's** 13-member Task Force Crimson Tactical Security Element was on a routine patrol in Bajawri Village, Parwan Province, Afghanistan.

An approaching man on a motorcycle suddenly placed a motorcycle-borne improvised explosive device within fifteen feet of Frederick's position. Frederick lunged towards the motorcycle just as the terrorist detonated the device.

The attack mortally wounded six Airmen and critically wounded five others, including Frederick. Despite receiving second degree burns to the right side of his body and being significantly wounded, Frederick established command and control of the scene, regrouped his surviving teammates and assigned each member fields of fire based on their abilities due to their own sustained injuries.

Frederick established perimeter security in preparation for a possible follow-on attack and directed communication with responding forces.

Despite being in extreme pain from his wounds, he coordinated the location for the medical evacuation helicopter landing zone and assisted with the tactical combat casualty care for his eleven teammates.

These incredible efforts ensured the casualties were evacuated from the battlefield merely 41 minutes after the attack. His actions were crucial to facilitating vital medical treatment for four critically wounded teammates, resulting in three saved lives.

Frederick remained on the battlefield and refused a medical evacuation until he confirmed all fallen heroes were transported, sensitive items were accounted for and U.S. Army Explosive Ordnance Disposal personnel completed their site assessment.

For these heroic actions and unselfish dedication to duty, Frederick was awarded the Bronze Star with Valor, the Purple Heart Medal, the Air Force Combat Action Medal and the North Atlantic Treaty Organization's Meritorious Service Medal. He was also one of three active duty security forces members honored by being named an Honorary Air Force Office of Special Investigations Special Agent, a first for Security Forces in AFOSI's prestigious 67-year history.

While deployed in support of Operation INHERENT RESOLVE, this Special Operations Surgical Team (SOST) provided care for more than 750 patients, managed 19 mass casualty events, performed 16 life-saving surgeries, and cared for casualties exposed to chemical weapons.

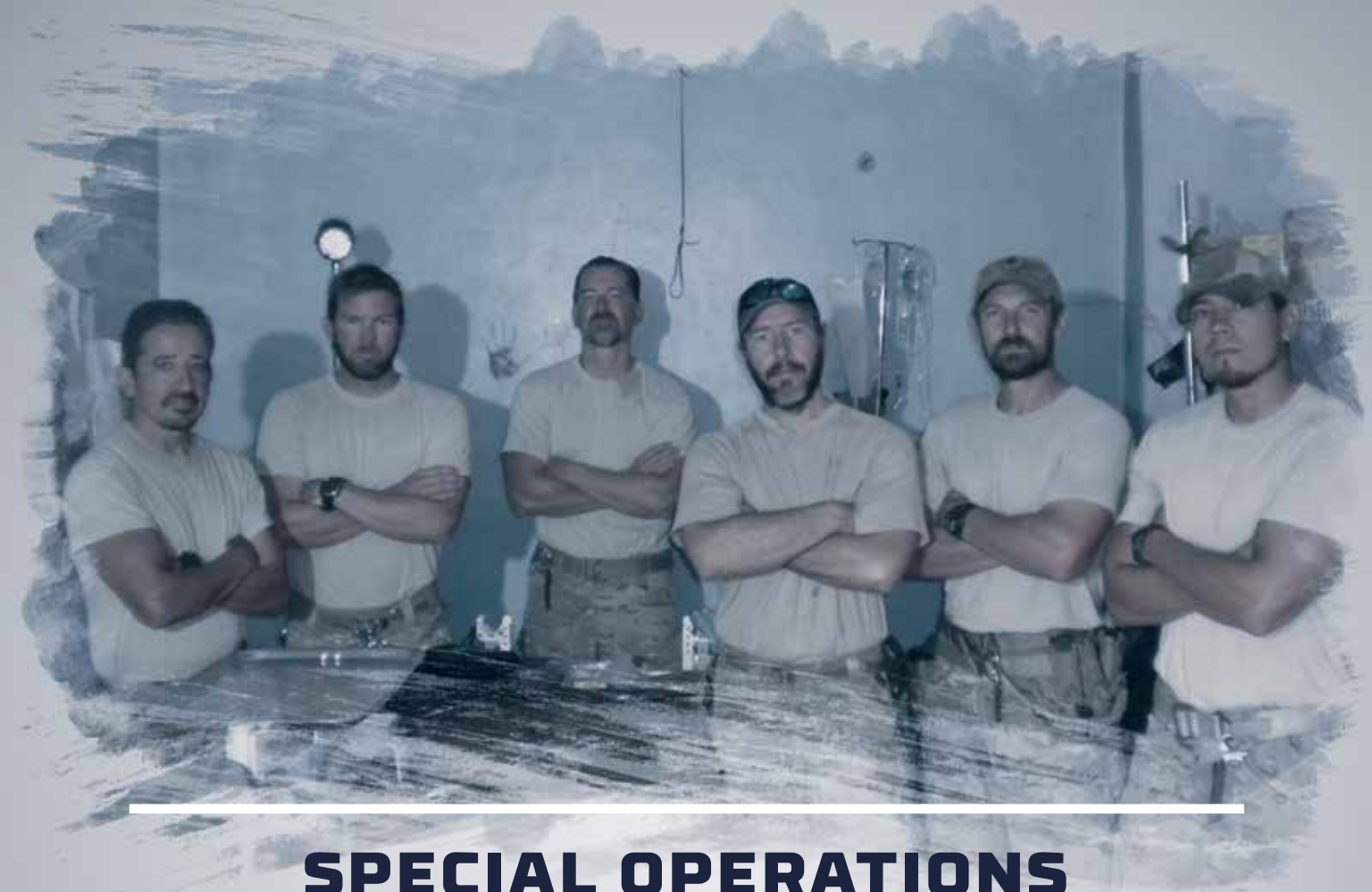
The team moved by ground convoy through unsecure territory to an abandoned residence and converted it into a makeshift hospital and casualty collection point for patient treatment and surgery. They immediately began receiving a continuous flow of casualties due to being three kilometers away from a besieged city. Electricity, clean water, medical supplies, and blood were always in short supply. The supply of blood reached critical levels as the flow of patients continued unabated.

Maj. Nelson Pacheco rallied local fighters to provide multiple units of blood; however, one critically injured patient required more blood during surgery. Capt. Cade Reedy donated his own blood that saved the local fighter's life. In total, this overall effort provided more than 30 units of life-saving blood.

On a separate occasion, a large family raced toward a checkpoint while insurgents fired automatic machine guns along their course. Scores of women and children needed immediate care. Lt. Col. Ben Mitchell and Pacheco cared for the critically wounded while the dead lay at their feet. With more patients than providers, the SOST treated casualties that an emergency room team would have struggled to manage. Lt. Col. Matthew Uber surgically secured the airway of a young girl whose face and jaw had been horribly damaged. Tech. Sgt. Richard Holguin established an airway on one casualty while single-handedly managing another patient's chest injury. To compound the chaotic situation, mortar rounds whistled overhead and detonated 250 meters away. The team donned body armor, readied weapons, and continued to care for the severely injured patients.

For the first time ever in a forward wartime environment, Maj. Justin Manley performed a procedure that placed a balloon catheter through a critically injured patient's femoral artery into the aorta. The balloon catheter was then inflated in order to stop the bleeding. This temporary measure provided valuable time to stabilize the patient and allowed him to survive en route to the operating room. This new device was used three more times during the deployment, saving four patients who otherwise would not have survived.

Each member of the team has been submitted for Bronze Stars for their courageous actions and exemplary performance in saving hundreds of lives during continuous 24-hour medical operations over eight weeks.



## SPECIAL OPERATIONS SURGICAL TEAM

LIEUTENANT COLONEL  
**BEN MITCHELL**

EMERGENCY ROOM TECHNICIAN

LIEUTENANT COLONEL  
**MATTHEW UBER**

NURSE ANESTHETIST

MAJOR  
**JUSTIN MANLEY**  
SURGEON

MAJOR **NELSON PACHECO**  
EMERGENCY ROOM NURSE

CAPTAIN **CADE REEDY**  
EMERGENCY ROOM NURSE

TECH. SGT. **RICHARD HOLGUIN**  
RESPIRATORY THERAPIST



**STAFF SGT. RICHARD HUNTER**  
COMBAT CONTROLLER

On Nov. 2, 2016, in Kunduz Province, Afghanistan, **Staff Sgt. Richard Hunter**, the U.S. Army Special Forces Team he was embedded with and their Afghan partners were ambushed by heavy machine gun fire from insurgents in elevated positions as they entered a village.

Hunter identified multiple enemy locations and directed multiple danger close strikes that were so close that the team was blasted by dirt as they pushed deeper into the village.

Hunter's team maneuvered through a narrow alley and ran into a locked metal gate that temporarily trapped them in an enemy ambush of grenades and machine gun fire, resulting in four friendly force injuries.

Hunter charged forward under a barrage of enemy fire to shield the wounded with his body while calling in suppressing fire. He coordinated close air support strikes, deconflicted airspace, and maximized fire support from overhead gunships, repelling the enemies' advance and allowing medics to treat and move casualties.

Smoke from the battle became so thick that the team maneuvered blindly through the village under Hunter's aircraft-aided direction. The ground force commander received a mortal wound and Hunter again braved enemy fire to protect his wounded teammate.

Hunter initiated the launch of the Quick Reaction Force (QRF) and casualty evacuation helicopter before joining two teammates to clear adjacent buildings to find temporary refuge from the enemy onslaught.

In the middle of the chaos, Hunter heard someone call for help. Peering over a wall, he saw a member of his team with serious injuries lying exposed, pinned down, and unable to move. Hunter led a fire team back into the kill zone at great risk to their lives to recover their wounded teammate. During this recovery, he directed airstrikes with a radio in one hand while dragging the rescued team member 30 meters to safety with his other hand. After the QRF arrived, the team maneuvered to an open field for helicopter evacuation and were again ambushed. Hunter directed overhead fires to eliminate the threat while helping to load the wounded.

In all, Hunter controlled 31 AC-130 and AH-64 danger close engagements that eliminated 27 enemy forces while saving his team, with the closest precision strike nine feet away.

As the Mosul offensive commenced, **Staff Sgt. Christopher Lewis** and the U.S. Navy SEAL Team in which he was embedded were tasked to advise, assist, and accompany Kurdish Peshmerga forces in order to clear two villages held by heavily entrenched ISIS fighters.

On Oct. 20, 2016, Lewis and his team escorted the partner force into enemy-held territory where they were quickly ambushed from three locations and engaged in a ten-hour firefight. As his team attempted to break contact with the enemy, the automated .50 caliber turret system on Lewis' vehicle became disabled.

In the midst of withering grenade, mortar, and small arms fire, Lewis systematically engaged the enemy in multiple locations from the open turret. He held this vulnerable position for hours despite direct enemy fire impacting within inches of him.

While the fight raged all around him, Lewis directed F-15Es and B-52s to conduct airstrikes within 400 meters of his team, eliminating enemy defensive fighting positions and fighters moving toward their position. After successfully engaging multiple targets and suppressing enemy fire, Lewis identified, engaged, and destroyed an enemy vehicle-borne improvised explosive device barreling toward his team at high speed - exploding within 100 meters of the convoy.

Moving out of the line of fire to recover, the convoy was ambushed again by enemy fire from a concealed tunnel entrance only 100 meters away. They maneuvered away from the attack as Lewis prepared to direct an airstrike on the building. During the movement, the team in the lead vehicle identified an improvised explosive device (IED) ahead and halted the convoy.

As the convoy backed away, another IED detonated, triggering seven subsequent explosions that rocked the team and mortally wounded one U.S. service member. Without hesitation, Lewis leapt out of the turret and ran across the top of the truck to assist the wounded.

Lewis controlled the casualty evacuation on the radio while simultaneously providing medical care to his teammates. While he moved his severely wounded teammate and established a hasty helicopter landing zone, he also worked with aircraft to assess and eliminate a second vehicle-borne threat before it reached his team.

Over the course of the hours-long firefight, Lewis engaged the enemy at close range on three occasions within 100 meters and directed four precise airstrikes, which provided his team crucial air coverage and eliminated more than 20 enemy forces. He has been recommended for the Silver Star Medal for his actions.

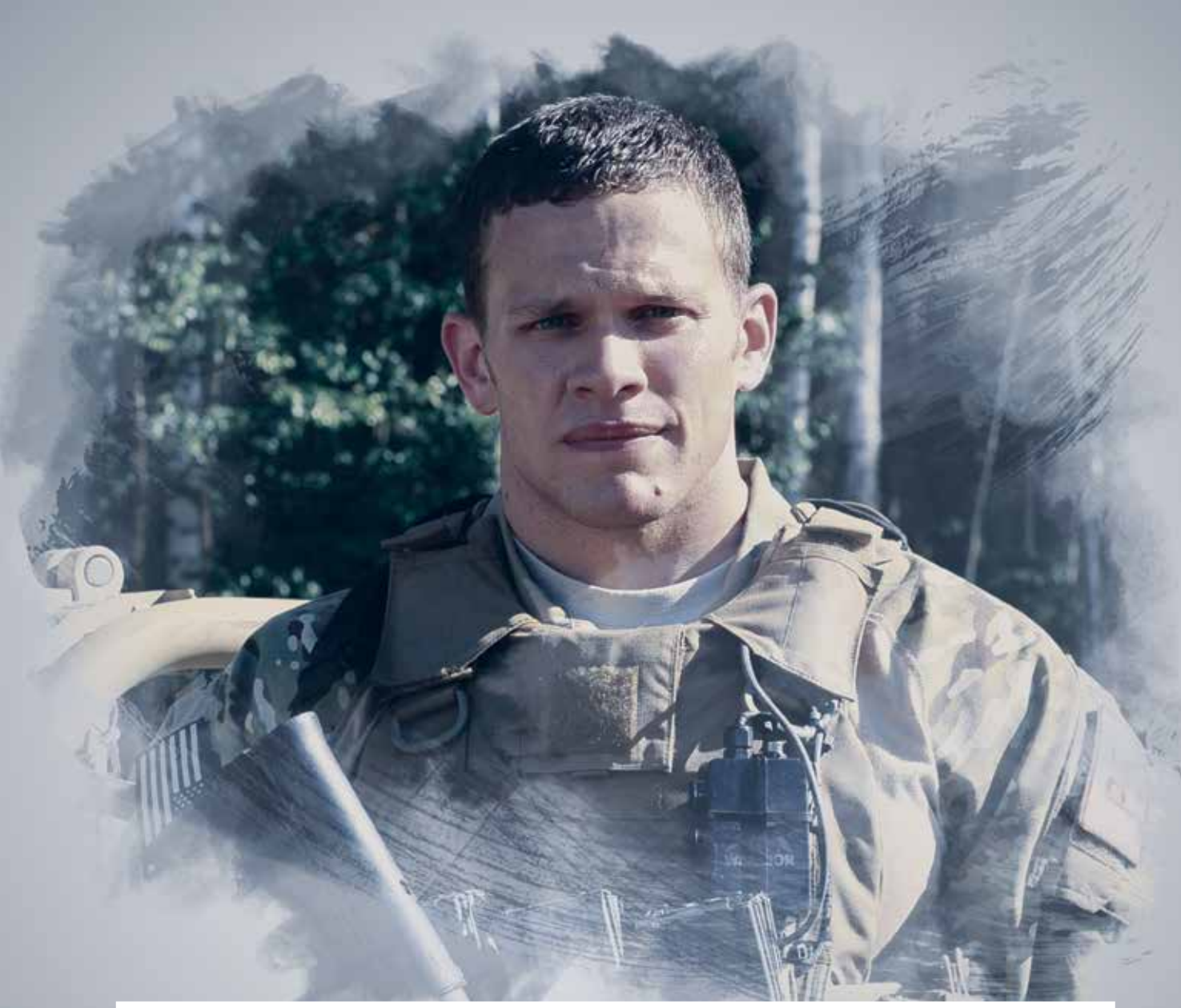


**STAFF SGT. CHRISTOPHER LEWIS**  
COMBAT CONTROLLER



# **COURAGE** *in* **DUTY**

America's Airmen exhibit courage around the globe every day in their commitment to integrity, service, and excellence. Whether fighting a raging wildfire, staring down enemy aggressors in an ungoverned space, or rescuing lives from a burning helicopter, these military and civilian Airmen exemplify the highest values of courage and duty. They did what needed to be done with little thought for their own safety.



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**STAFF SGT. BRADLEY LITTLE**  
SECURITY FORCES

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On the night of April 20, 2016, **Staff Sgt. Bradley Little** spotted a semi truck and three pickup trucks racing towards his compound in Agadez, Niger, where his Close Precision Engagement (CPE) team was deployed to protect convoy operations. He positioned his forces on the compound and prepared to meet the threat.

Through his night vision goggles, he observed that each of the vehicles had several passengers. The vehicles approached the camp to within 500 meters of the perimeter and separated into different directions as they increased speed. The semi truck proceeded east and halted 50 meters outside of the perimeter fence, while the remaining trucks drove toward the compound's sole Entry Control Point.

Little directed each CPE team, as well as on-scene forces, to establish a perimeter and move the most capable weapons to a position where they could block aggressors from reaching the compound. He and his team of sharpshooters identified six or more passengers in each of the pickup trucks and then proceeded to assign targets.

With the vehicles approaching, Little instructed all responding forces to activate their visible laser aiming devices mounted on their weapon system as the final effort to halt the vehicles. Upon seeing the lasers, the approaching trucks immediately halted, reversed course, and retreated 1,000 meters from the base for a span of twenty minutes before departing back into the local village closest to the base.

Little's leadership prevented the vehicles from threatening a perimeter that was not capable of stopping a racing vehicle. His decision to employ visible lasers prior to firing upon the vehicles showed his courage, foresight, and ability to think clearly while under pressure.

His actions enabled deployed Security Forces to initiate the region's first outside-the-wire patrols, dominate a 25 kilometer Base Security Zone, and eventually extend the unmanned aerial reconnaissance support to fight against regional terrorists organizations. For his intrepid leadership on that night, Little was awarded the Air Force Achievement Medal.

On Nov. 12, 2016, **Senior Airman Joshua O'Sullivan**, a respiratory therapist attached to a Critical Care Air Transportation Team deployed to Bagram Airfield, Afghanistan, heard a large explosion near his quarters.

A trained medic, O'Sullivan ran toward the scene where he saw several injured people. No other medical personnel had yet arrived on scene.

He provided initial medical aid while quickly taking steps to open the airways of wounded Soldiers that had penetrating head injuries, a sucking chest wound, and an abdomen wound.

While triaging six wounded patients, he determined that immediate surgical capabilities were required. O'Sullivan directed available personnel to quickly load and evacuate injured individuals from the blast site to the Craig Joint Theater Hospital, using nearby military police vehicles.

Within minutes, the site of the attack was clear of casualties and O'Sullivan rode with the last victim in the back of a pickup truck, continuing to control the bleeding while stabilizing the patient's condition.

Once he arrived at the hospital, he assisted with the care of the 17 critically injured patients, providing airway support with oxygenation, hemorrhage control, chest tube insertion and critical intravenous access.

O'Sullivan worked feverishly until all critical patients were transported to surgery. Later that same night, O'Sullivan and his team returned to Craig Joint Theater Hospital to assist in patient transport. They loaded eight critically wounded patients onto a C-17, ensuring their immediate evacuation to Germany to receive higher level care.

O'Sullivan was awarded the Air Force Commendation Medal for his decisive actions that helped save the lives of 12 U.S. military members and one coalition military member.



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**SENIOR AIRMAN JOSHUA O'SULLIVAN**  
CARDIOPULMONARY LABORATORY  
TECHNICIAN AND RESPIRATORY THERAPIST

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## **GREGORY GANGNUSS**

CIVIL ENGINEER

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On Oct. 11, 2015, **Greg Gangnuss** heard a helicopter crash near his building in Kabul, Afghanistan. Fearful that there were no survivors, he rushed through a whirlwind of dust, smoke and debris toward the mangled helicopter. A hand reached out from a small window under the helicopter's rotor shaft — the first sign of life.

Gangnuss climbed atop the downed British Puma MK2, removed the door and began clearing a path into the collapsed passenger compartment. He spent the next two hours on his stomach, working in thick smoke, dust and leaking fuel, carefully extracting survivors and the deceased from the wreckage. Only four of the nine people onboard survived the crash.

Rescue efforts continued as darkness fell. Another rescuer held a portable light so Gangnuss and others could see within the cabin.

Ninety-eight minutes after impact, Gangnuss emerged from the wreckage soaked in fuel, sweat and blood carrying the final casualty.

Col. Laurel Burkel, one of the four survivors, commented on the bravery shown by Gangnuss in saving her life, noting that the burning wreckage was covered in jet fuel and likely to blow up at any time. For her part, Burkel showed tremendous courage and perseverance in recovering from a broken neck to return to flying status.

On Feb. 22, 2017, the Air Force recognized Gangnuss' heroism when Gen. Ellen Pawlikowski, commander of Air Force Materiel Command, presented him with the Air Force Civilian Award for Valor. The award recognizes heroism and courage by individuals who voluntarily risk personal safety beyond the call of duty.

On Sept. 19, 2016, a 30th Space Wing fire dozer team was on their third day of battling a canyon fire on Vandenberg Air Force Base, Calif. They had just finished making fire-breaks in Lompoc Canyon when they received a call that the wind had shifted direction and they were needed immediately at a critical site.

They arrived as the fire was threatening to jump a road toward the national space launch assets a few hundred yards away.

With fire dancing around them and searing heat making it difficult to breathe, Tech Sgt. Robert Taron sent the first dozer up the road to get ahead of the fire, and then off-loaded the second dozer. With the second dozer breaking ground, he rushed up the road to find the first dozer and help off-load it. The team pushed their fear aside and battled the inferno of flames that threatened to overwhelm them.

Within moments, with temperatures burning their skin beneath their protective gear, the team was standing in an archway of flame that reached 70-feet into the air and scorched power lines above their heads. As the final ground-defense between the flames and a space launch complex with an Atlas rocket on the pad, they knew he had to buy time for aircraft support.

The team stayed in the archway of flame for as long as they could, surrounded by a scalding backdraft, with the roar of the fire sounding like a freight train. They battled spot fires that jumped the road.

They held the fire at bay for four hours, allowing the complex to be evacuated and the DC-10 aircraft to drop fire retardant. With the air fogged with cinders, smoke and fire retardant dust, Taron drove through the inferno to retrieve the rest of the crew who were still working several hundred feet up the road.

They continued to put out spot fires until all risk had been eliminated. Had they not risked their lives to block the fire, it would have put dozens of lives in peril and caused untold damage.



## 30TH SPACE WING DOZER TEAM

TECH. SGT. **ROBERT TARON**  
FIRE DOZER TEAM LEADER

**WILLIAM PHELPS**  
INITIAL ATTACK DOZER  
OPERATOR

STAFF SGT. **THOMAS WILLIAMS**  
INITIAL ATTACK DOZER OPERATOR

**RAMON ESCOBEDO, JR.**  
INITIAL ATTACK DOZER  
OPERATOR

SENIOR AIRMAN  
**BRANDON PRINTISS**  
SUPPLY RUNNER

SENIOR AIRMAN **MARCUS YOUNG**  
DOZER SWAMPER

AIRMAN 1ST CLASS  
**ISHMELL MUTIDI**  
DOZER SWAMPER

SENIOR AIRMAN  
**RONALD SKALA III**  
DOZER SWAMPER



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LIEUTENANT COLONEL  
**WILLIAM SCHROEDER**

342ND TRAINING SQUADRON COMMANDER

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On the morning of April 8, 2016, **Lt. Col. William Schroeder**, a career special operations weather officer, saw an armed individual enter his squadron. He reacted swiftly by putting himself between the armed individual and his first sergeant. After Schroeder ordered her to run, the first sergeant heard three shots fired as she bolted from the room, followed by more shots after she left.

During the intense struggle with the gunman, Schroeder suffered several significant defensive wounds prior to succumbing to a fatal shot. His swift, heroic and selfless actions prevented the perpetrator from shooting anyone else in the squadron.

Schroeder was much more than an Airman, a special operations weather officer and a commander. He was also a dedicated husband and father of two young sons.

“Bill was the finest example of commander, leader, husband, father, and friend. He was amazing in all those roles. Bill always did the right thing the right way—especially when it was a tough decision,” said Maj. Jonathan Sawtelle, who served as Schroeder’s director of operations at 10th Combat Weather Squadron. “Bill was patient, never vindictive, slow to anger.”

As an elite Air Force Special Operations Weather Officer, Schroeder led other Special Tactics Airmen in the world’s only tactically trained meteorological force.

Schroeder, who had previously earned a Bronze Star, was posthumously awarded the Airman’s Medal, given to those who distinguish themselves by a heroic act. Schroeder was laid to rest with full military honors June 16, 2016, at Arlington National Cemetery, Va.

A man in a white uniform and sunglasses is leaning on the open door of a vehicle, looking out over a body of water. The image is faded and serves as a background for the text.

## **COURAGE** *in the* **COMMUNITY**

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America's Airmen, with their commitment to core values, are never off the clock. They make their communities better places for everyone. These Airmen safeguarded the lives of their fellow community members by diving into treacherous water to rescue a drowning swimmer, pulling a man out of a burning vehicle, saving lives after a deadly hurricane, and facing down a knife-wielding attacker in a restaurant. They are sentries in America's communities.

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On Aug. 5, 2016, **Tech. Sgt. Jason Blas** was with his family at a beach in Guam and noted unusually hazardous water conditions. He soon heard cries for help coming from the water.

He scanned the waters and spotted a swimmer struggling to keep afloat against the strong tides. Blas instructed his wife to call 911 and rallied fellow bystanders to join him at the reef line to direct the swimmer to safety.

The surf pushed the man underwater, where he lost consciousness, and forced him further from shore. Realizing time was running out, Blas jumped into the violent waters and searched for the swimmer. After several attempts to swim to the unconscious man, Blas finally found him and swam fifty yards against the rough current to reach the reef line with the man in tow.

After pulling the man to safety, Blas performed life-saving actions to prevent him from choking on sea water. When the local fire department arrived on scene, Blas provided a report of the incident and acted as a translator between the man, a Korean tourist, and emergency officials.

Once the man was safely in the care of responders, Blas received treatment for injuries on his feet, back and hands. The tourist was transported to a local hospital to receive further medical attention.

Blas was awarded the Air Force Achievement Medal for his courageous act.



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**TECH. SGT. JASON BLAS**  
FLIGHT CHIEF, PHARMACY

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4TH FIGHTER WING  
CIVIL ENGINEER TEAM

TECH. SGT. **JUSTIN FELLURE**  
FIREFIGHTER

TECH. SGT. **ANDREW VAUGHAN**  
FIREFIGHTER

**ERIK HAHS**  
FIREFIGHTER

In October 2016, Hurricane Matthew devastated the communities around Seymour Johnson Air Force Base, N.C. The flooding killed 22 people and trapped thousands.

During the storm's landfall, Tech. Sgt. Justin Fellure, Staff Sgt. Andrew Vaughan and Erik Hahs were dispatched to assist in rescue efforts throughout the community.

The Air Force team operated an Airport Crash Fire Rescue vehicle, the only vehicle large enough to navigate the flood waters, to reach stranded victims.

During the rescue efforts, the Airmen faced severe hazards including downed power lines, fallen trees, wind gusts exceeding 60 mph, and rushing flood waters.

As the flooding waters reached record levels, the Airmen worked alongside Wayne County Swift Water Rescue Team members while nearly submerged by the raging waters.

The Airmen established and manned rescue lines when a tree snapped and swept away one of the rescue swimmers and his boat. The Airmen immediately sprung into action and recovered the swimmer.

They strategically maneuvered upstream between trees to rescue a stranded woman clinging to a tree in fear of her life, saving her moments before the rising current reached her position. The Airmen ultimately saved the lives of eight community members.

Without the self-sacrificing efforts of these firefighters, the death toll in Wayne County would have been higher. Eight people are alive today because of the bravery of these Airmen.

On Dec. 20, 2016, **Airman 1st Class PeeJay Jack** watched a dump truck lose control and collide with multiple vehicles on Florida's Interstate 4.

Jack raced to the crash site and immediately checked the status of all the wounded. He focused on the highest priority victim, an unconscious man with a broken leg trapped in a vehicle that was on fire.

Realizing the danger of the situation, Jack worked feverishly to extract him. He worked with another bystander, using a crow bar to pry the door open.

Jack entered the burning vehicle and raced against time to free the victim's mangled leg from under the dashboard, even as the flames on the car began to spread, threatening to engulf the car. By the time Jack had carried the victim uphill fifty yards back to the Interstate, the car was completely consumed in flames.

Jack then provided first-aid by protecting the protruding leg bone while treating the victim for shock until emergency responders could reach them.

Jack's quick and decisive action, even at great risk to himself, saved the man's life. He has been submitted for an Airman's Medal as a result of his actions.



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AIRMAN 1ST CLASS **PEEJAY JACK**  
VEHICLE MAINTENANCE

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SENIOR AIRMAN **LOGAN LINGREN**  
AIRCRAFT MAINTAINER

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October 16, 2016, began as a normal day for **Senior Airman Logan Lingren**. Little did he know that by the end of the day, his actions in a restaurant near Spokane, would help save a life and put a knife-wielding attacker behind bars.

Lingren was at a local laundromat, and while his clothes were washing, he decided to walk to a local fast food restaurant and grab a bite to eat.

Upon entering, Lingren saw a distressed woman standing outside the men's restroom screaming for help. Lingren rushed to the woman's aid, where she described the horrific scene of one man taking a knife from his jacket and stabbing another man.

With complete disregard for their own safety, and despite the cramped confines of the room, Lingren and a restaurant employee ran into the restroom, identified the man with the knife, and forced him to the ground. They successfully restrained the man's arms and legs while attempting to remove the knife from his hand.

They continued to restrain the attacker until police arrived on scene, and then assisted the officer until back-up law enforcement officials arrived. With the scene secure, emergency responders were able to render aid to the victim.

Lingren's actions likely saved the man's life. For his prompt and selfless action, Lingren was awarded the Air Force Commendation medal.

"I believe most people would do the same if they were in the situation," Lingren said. "Until it actually happens, you'll never really know for sure."



On April 29, 2016, while visiting a local beauty salon in the Republic of Korea, **Staff Sgt. Cierra Rogers** smelled smoke and turned to see flames.

She realized she was trapped alongside a mother and three children: ages four, three and eight months. With smoke filling the building and the family struggling with smoke inhalation, Rogers kicked out a window to create an escape route, suffering a severe laceration to her leg. Unfortunately, a safe escape via the window proved impossible as the family was unable to safely descend to the alley 37 feet below. Rogers, ignoring her wounds, led the family into a storage area to breathe smoke-free air.

She quickly determined that the only way to save the family was by finding additional support below. Upon discovering another window with an adjacent metal cable that led to the street below, Rogers informed the family that she was going to get help.

While descending down the wires, she lost her grip and fell the remaining fifteen feet to the alley below. **Master Sgt. Daniel Raimondo**, an emergency manager who had seen the flames, helped carry her to a safe location while she told him about the family.

Raimondo looked up to see the woman holding her four-year-old daughter out the fifth story window. Looking around, Raimondo saw a nearby blanket shop. He realized they could use the blanket as a trampoline to soften the landing. Others followed with more material to soften the fall. Raimondo gathered and took charge of 15 to 20 military, civilian and local spectators. Raimondo began pleading with the woman to throw her baby. He went on to ensure all hands involved would grip the blanket tightly. He continued to beg and plead for the mother to throw the baby until she complied.

The infant girl made the journey, falling to the blanket and to the ground softly. The other two children followed next and finally the pregnant mother jumped out. Besides typical shock, smoke inhalation and a couple of minor injuries to the mother, the family survived this traumatic event.

Tragically, 22 days after the incident, Rogers died from unexpected complications. Along with news coverage highlighting the rescue, she received a citation of merit and plaque of appreciation from the Pyeongatek Governor for her selfless actions, and was nominated posthumously for an Airman's Medal. Raimondo was also submitted for an Airman's Medal.

The family credits their rescue to the bravery of Rogers and Raimondo and the support of their joint partners.



MASTER SGT.  
**DANIEL RAIMONDO**  
EMERGENCY MANAGER



STAFF SGT.  
**CIERRA ROGERS**  
ADMINISTRATIVE ASSISTANT

A person in a flight suit is holding a small American flag. The image is in black and white with a light overlay. The person's face is partially visible, looking down at the flag. The background is a blurred outdoor setting.

# **COURAGE** *in the* **FACE** **OF ADVERSITY**

**We learn our strength through how we respond to adversity. These Airmen and family members all faced horrific challenges and overcame that adversity to emerge even stronger. Their courage and love of service sustained them through dark times. Every one of these Airmen took the harder path and worked tirelessly to return to service.**

**They are an inspiration to all of us.**



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TECH. SGT. **ROBIN HOPKINS**  
SECURITY FORCES

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It was just a regular day on the job for Bernalillo County Sheriff's Deputy **Robin Hopkins**, also a Guardsman in the New Mexico Air National Guard, when the call came across the radio that officers were down and a suspect was heading north from the scene.

Hopkins raced out of the sub-station in pursuit of the suspect. She knew the local roads and took a route to cut off the suspect.

The suspect, a violent criminal known to target police, was in a stolen police car.

When Hopkins saw the stolen police car coming straight for her, she had just seconds to make a plan. Her plan was to get in front of him to force a crash, which would allow pursuing police officers to apprehend him. Hopkins had just started to turn her car into the oncoming lane when the suspect fired at her, hitting the car's engine block.

The suspect continued to fire as he attempted to drive around Hopkins' improvised blockade. Another shot hit her vehicle's hood. The driver then drove parallel to Hopkins and fired once more. The fourth round went through driver's side door and hit Hopkins, shattering her left hip, destroying the main artery and causing extensive damage to two femoral arteries, limiting circulation to her foot.

After the chaotic incident where others were injured and the suspect killed, Hopkins started a long road to recovery, committed to doing whatever it would take to remain in the Air Force.

Twenty months later, in June 2016, Hopkins prepared to take her physical fitness test. With a hundred members of her Guard family and two of her physical therapists cheering her on, Hopkins ran a 14:58 mile-and-a-half and completed her required sit-ups and push-ups, achieving her goal and passing her annual requirement to remain a security forces specialist with the 150th Security Forces Squadron.

Hopkins demonstrated courage in the face of danger and resiliency in overcoming a major challenge to return to duty.

On March 22, 2016, having just returned from a deployment in Afghanistan, **Lt. Col. Kato Martinez**, his wife, Gail, and their four children, Kianni, Kimo, Noelani and Kailani, were looking forward to boarding a plane bound for Orlando, Fla., and a long-awaited family vacation.

Then, out of nowhere, their world blew up. Suicide bombers detonated two suitcase bombs in the Brussels Airport terminal within feet from where the Martinez family stood in line to check bags.

Martinez was immediately struck by a wave of heat that lifted him off the ground and caused second and third-degree burns across his arms, legs, and head, along with a fractured heel, shrapnel wounds, a concussion, hearing loss, and a left-foot laceration. Lying there in grave condition, he felt his body succumbing to his injuries. All he could hear was his oldest daughter, Kianni, screaming, "Daddy, don't you leave me, too."

First responders flooded the scene, one of whom found Martinez's youngest daughter, Kailani, cradled in Gail's arms. After the first responder took hold of the child and reassured Gail that her child was safe, Gail smiled and closed her eyes for the last time.

The Martinez family was treated at the Brussels Army General Hospital in the first month after the attack, then transported back to the United States to the Shriners Hospitals for Children in Galveston, Texas. There, the family began a grueling rehabilitative process that included skin graft surgeries and procedures to repair perforated ear drums.

The entire family suffered injuries, with 18-year-old Kianni going through 16 surgeries on her foot. Having a fractured ankle with loss of bone and blood vessels in her left foot, she continues with physical therapy. Using the AFROTC scholarship she earned prior to the attack, she plans to major in computer science with a focus in robotics and artificial intelligence with the aim of being the next Martinez Airman.

A year after the attack, the Martinez family is still adjusting to life and loss. Weekly physical therapy continues for Kato, Kianni and Kimo. All the children have returned to school and are participating in extracurricular activities, with the exception of Kianni, who hopes to start college in the summer of 2017.

Kato Martinez, who received a Purple Heart, continues to serve on active duty in San Antonio. The courage and strength of the Martinez family inspires countless others.



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LIEUTENANT COLONEL  
**MELCHIZEDEK "KATO" MARTINEZ**  
AND FAMILY  
EXECUTIVE OFFICER

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## CAPTAIN **CHRISTY WISE**

HC-130J PILOT

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On April 11, 2015, while paddle boarding in Destin, Fla., **Capt. Christy Wise** was struck by a boat. She survived because of her quick reaction to swim away from the propeller after being struck, her boyfriend's fast action in making a tourniquet, and the help of locals in a nearby fishing boat.

Although her life was saved, she lost her right leg above the knee. Wise spent eight months in grueling physical rehabilitation at the Center for the Intrepid in San Antonio, Texas.

A mere nine weeks after her accident, Wise participated in the Department of Defense Warrior Games for the Air Force where she won 11 medals. She represented Team USA in the international Invictus Games in May, 2016.

Upon return, she had to pass an Air Force fitness test, requalify on flight simulators and prove to the medical board she could perform the tasks of a pilot. She first had to prove that she was fit to serve and then prove that she was fit to fly.

Wise returned to active duty May 20, 2016, a little more than a year after her injury. She was later reinstated as a pilot on June 27, becoming only the sixth amputee, and first female, to return to flying in the Air Force after losing a limb.

While fighting to return to flying, Wise freely shared her story with Airmen and civilians at various venues. She thanks her squadron, base and the Air Force for supporting her throughout her recovery process. Humbled by how many people reached out to her, she started a nonprofit organization for amputee children in Haiti. The organization held its first fundraiser in August 2015, a paddle board race in the same spot where she was hit.

In 2016, Wise led two separate teams to Haiti where they delivered ten prostheses, fixed twelve existing prostheses, made two braces and provided physical and occupational therapy.

Wise's courage and determination to continue her Air Force career while also using her experience to help others exemplifies tremendous courage and strength of character. Wise received both the Wilma Vaught Leadership Award and Parker Greene Volunteer Award.

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**Courage is doing what  
you're afraid to do.  
There can be no courage  
unless you're scared.**

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CAPT. EDDIE RICKENBACKER  
American fighter ace, World War I

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