PRESENTED BY THE UNITED STATES AIR FORCE

VOLUME 9

PORTRAITS IN COURAGE

THE CHIEF OF STAFF'S

PORTRAITS IN COURAGE

The United States Air Force reflects America's spirit; the indomitable will to always reach higher, to always see over the next ridge line or into the next decade, the willingness to die for the things that matter most, like freedom and the defense of others. That spirit is fueled by the trust in our people, one of our greatest strengths; it produces Airmen like the ones we humbly present in this ninth volume of Portraits in Courage.

Each story graphically depicts an Airman's will to do the right thing, when it mattered most, and to selflessly accept risk for the life of another. Their agility in the face of real danger shows that our core values are more than words. Our Airmen face these situations each and every day around the globe. Each of them has their own story. In fact, it would take many volumes to highlight them all.

So as you read this year's Portraits in Courage, perhaps these men and women will sound familiar. Perhaps they will remind you of a neighbor, a family member, a co-worker or friend that serves. Whether they fly airplanes, defuse IEDs, fight fires or provide support to our warfighters, all of our Airmen are remarkable. They believe in integrity, in service, in excellence and are ready and willing to go in harm's way.

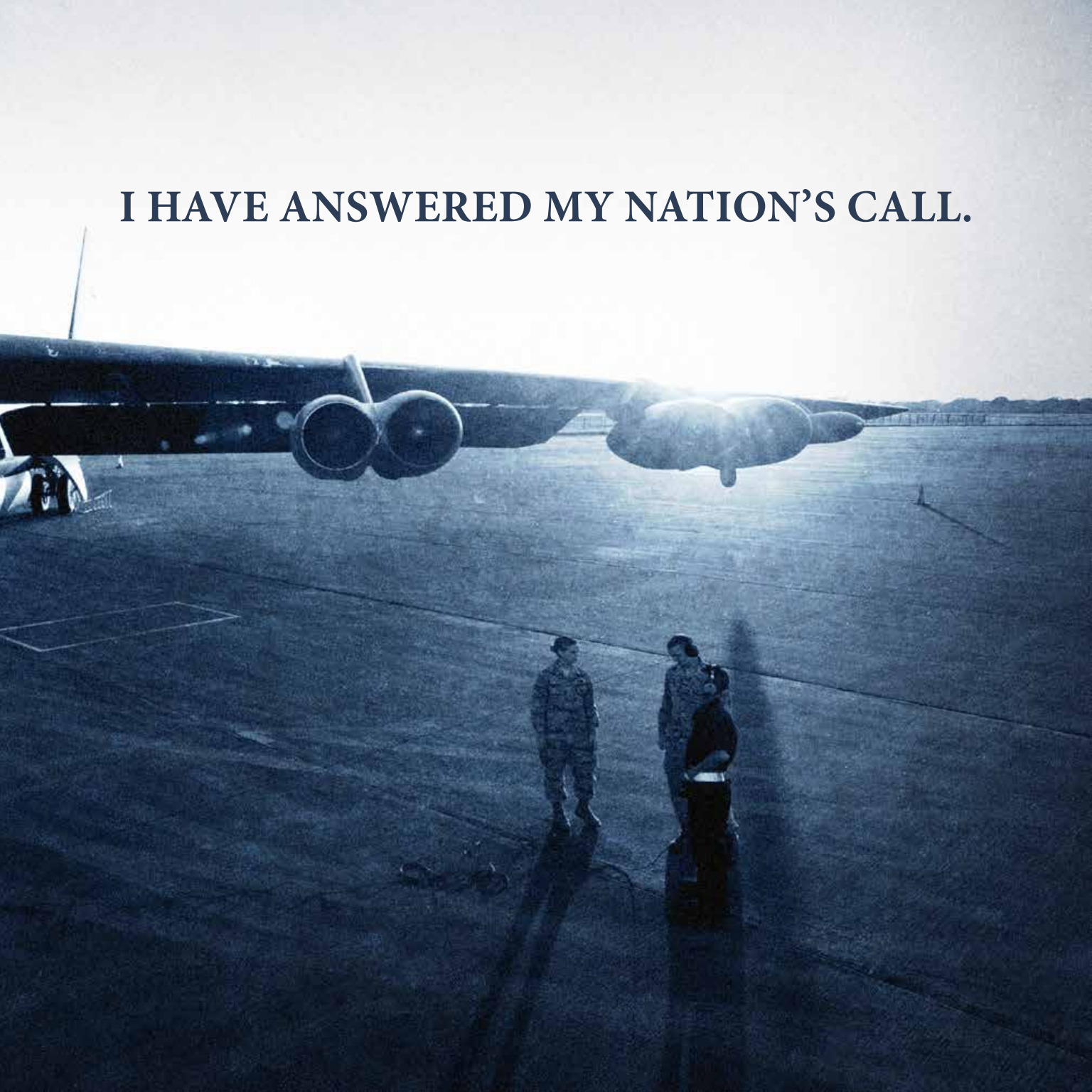
We believe in them - not just for who they are, but for what they represent. For us in the Profession of Arms, these stories inspire a further dedication to our creed, to our mission, and to each other. As Americans, we are unwilling to accept anything less than the greatest air force on the planet; these Airmen, our real-life heroes, prove the Air Force is capable of meeting that demand. They continue to strengthen the spirit of our nation and have earned our highest degree of trust.

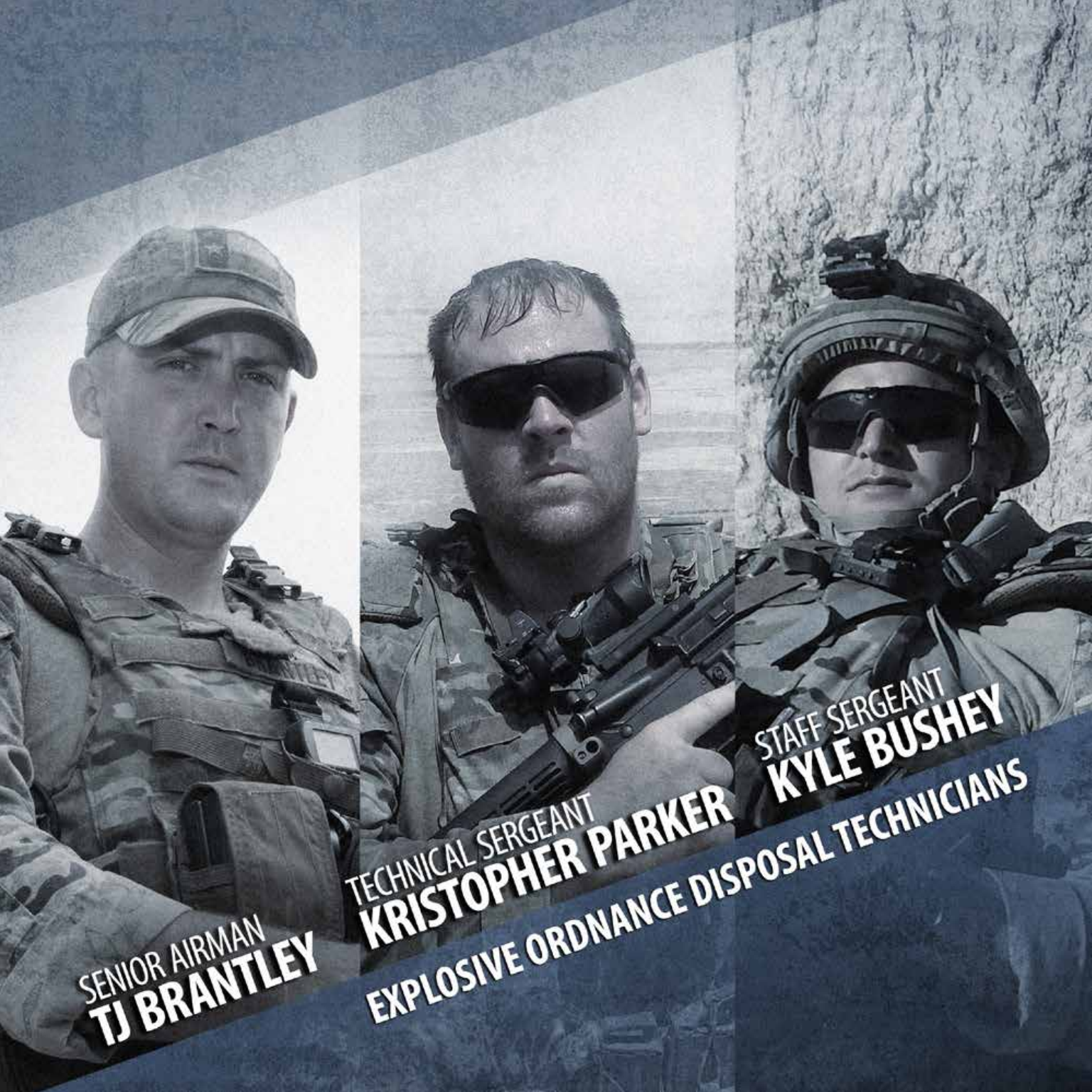
MARK A. WELSH III
General, USAF
Chief of Staff

JAMES A. CODY
Chief Master Sergeant
of the Air Force

I AM AN AMERICAN AIRMAN.
I AM A WARRIOR.

I HAVE ANSWERED MY NATION'S CALL.



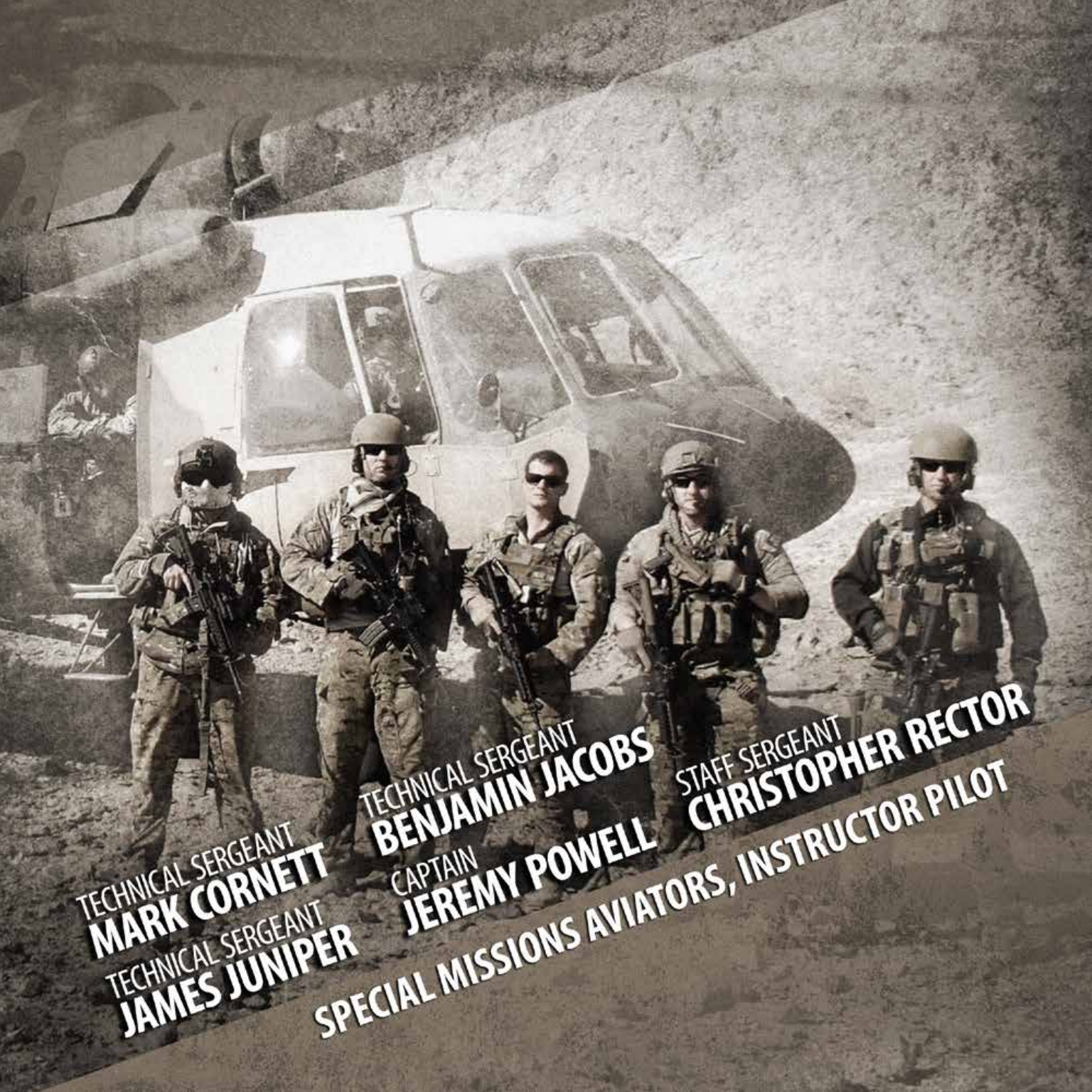

SENIOR AIRMAN
TJ BRANTLEY
TECHNICAL SERGEANT
KRISTOPHER PARKER
STAFF SERGEANT
KYLE BUSHEY
EXPLOSIVE ORDNANCE DISPOSAL TECHNICIANS

On May 21, 2014, while deployed to the 466th Explosive Ordnance Disposal Flight Operating Location - Bravo, Tech. Sgt. **Kristopher Parker**, Senior Airman **TJ Brantley** and (then) Senior Airman **Kyle Bushey**, air assaulted into the mountains of Kandahar Providence in support of U.S. Army forces and Afghan Border Police. They were tasked with clearing a cave system suspected of housing improvised explosive devices, ammunition and supply caches for insurgent forces.

On first descent, within 100 meters from the cave opening, a fire fight erupted with rounds striking within one meter of the Airmen. Team members immediately returned suppressive fire, pinning down the insurgents in the cave. After several air strikes their team destroyed four IED caches on their second approach to the cave. Five hours into the mission the team approached the cave a third time following another round of close air support. The insurgents once again responded with machine gun fire from the cave opening. Brantley quickly returned fire and pulled a soldier out of the line of fire. During this engagement the Army lieutenant leading the element sustained a gunshot wound to the leg, instantly shattering bone. Insurgents then fired rocket-propelled grenades and threw a 20-pound IED that detonated within three meters of their position, throwing Parker and Brantley back resulting in severe concussions. After assessing injuries while still under fire the pair provided combat care to the lieutenant while Brantley carried him to a new cover position, and continued assisting the medic with additional first aid even lying on top of the wounded lieutenant shielding him from additional injury.

While moving in and out of consciousness from heat exposure and without hesitation for his own personal safety, Bushey provided effective cover fire with his M-4 rifle on the sniper positions. With rounds striking the rocks in front of him, Bushey shifted his fire to the entrance of the cave to provide suppressive fire on the enemy locations, allowing friendly troops to safely evacuate the injured platoon leader. Throughout the incident Bushey engaged the enemy with rifle fire and aided in the establishment of a new landing zone, making four trips up and down the mountain to guide reinforcements to the engagement area and provide resupply to his team. After facilitating the platoon leader's medevac, Parker evacuated with the rest of the unit, ending a 12-hour operation that sustained direct and indirect enemy fire and resulted in the destruction of an enemy stronghold. Due largely in part to Parker's leadership and expertise no American lives were lost that day.

Bushey's bravery and heroism selflessly put the lives of fellow Soldiers and Airmen before his own and directly enabled the trapped platoon to break contact and evacuate the wounded. Throughout the grueling 10-hour mission, despite dehydration and a traumatic brain injury, Brantley stayed in the fight providing cover fire and exposing his body to protect the wounded. He was awarded the Air Force Combat Action Medal and the Purple Heart Medal. For their courageous actions, Parker was submitted for the Silver Star, and both Brantley and Bushey have been submitted for the Bronze Star Medal with Valor.


TECHNICAL SERGEANT
MARK CORNETT
TECHNICAL SERGEANT
JAMES JUNIPER
TECHNICAL SERGEANT
BENJAMIN JACOBS
CAPTAIN
JEREMY POWELL
STAFF SERGEANT
CHRISTOPHER RECTOR
SPECIAL MISSIONS AVIATORS, INSTRUCTOR PILOT

On Oct. 8, 2013, five U.S. Air Force advisors were travelling in a two-ship formation of Afghan Mi-17 helicopters as part of a troop movement mission in Uruzgan Province. After assisting their Afghan counterparts in completing a successful dropoff, the five Airmen — Capt. **Jeremy Powell**, Staff Sgt. **Christopher Rector**, (then) Staff Sgt. **Mark Cornett**, (then) Staff Sgt. **Benjamin Jacobs** and Tech. Sgt. **James Juniper**— began their ascent out of the mountainous bowl surrounding the Gizab Valley. Following a brief stop to refuel and load the next unit of Afghan commandos, the crew learned of a critical patient requiring immediate medical evacuation and immediately responded. As they approached the landing zone, multiple gunshots rang out from the right side of the second aircraft in the formation as insurgents attempted to ambush the low-altitude helicopters. Cornett and Jacobs quickly identified the source of the gunfire and initiated evasive maneuvers while engaging the insurgents with their M-4 rifles.

As soon as he heard gunfire, Powell took control of the aircraft and aggressively turned away from the threat. Simultaneously, Cornett and Jacobs returned fire when a second group of insurgents began shooting. After hearing rounds impacting the helicopter the two advisors called a break away from the new threat and saw that Juniper had been severely wounded while manning the right-side M240 machinegun and was now lying unconscious on the floor of the aircraft's cabin. Jacobs and Cornett scrambled through a crowded cabin to the aid of their fallen wingman. Discovering that an insurgent's round had passed through Juniper's neck, the two Airmen quickly applied direct pressure to the entry and exit wounds.

As Powell began a left bank away from additional small arms fire, he saw an insurgent launch a rocket-propelled grenade and rapidly tightened his turn, narrowly avoiding impact. Despite an extremely hostile environment and continual exposure to enemy fire, the advisors' aircraft remained overhead long enough to provide their wingmen the cover they needed to evacuate critically-wounded Afghans. During the formation's exit from the valley, Powell and Rector witnessed the plume from a second RPG and quickly maneuvered the formation away from the threat. Rector then assisted Cornett and Jacobs in removing Juniper's body armor and administering aid to stop the loss of blood. The crew then quickly transported Juniper to the nearest coalition base, 80 miles away. Unfortunately, due to retrograde operations, no medical vehicles were available, which prompted Jacobs and Cornett to commandeer a truck and rush their injured crewmember to medical assistance.

The actions of Powell, Jacobs, Cornett and Rector saved the lives of Juniper and several wounded Afghans. For their courageous action each team member was submitted for the Distinguished Flying Cross with Valor.

STAFF SERGEANT
MECHELE FONCK

MASTER SERGEANT
DOMINICK GRIEGO

TECHNICAL SERGEANT
AUSTIN HARDIN

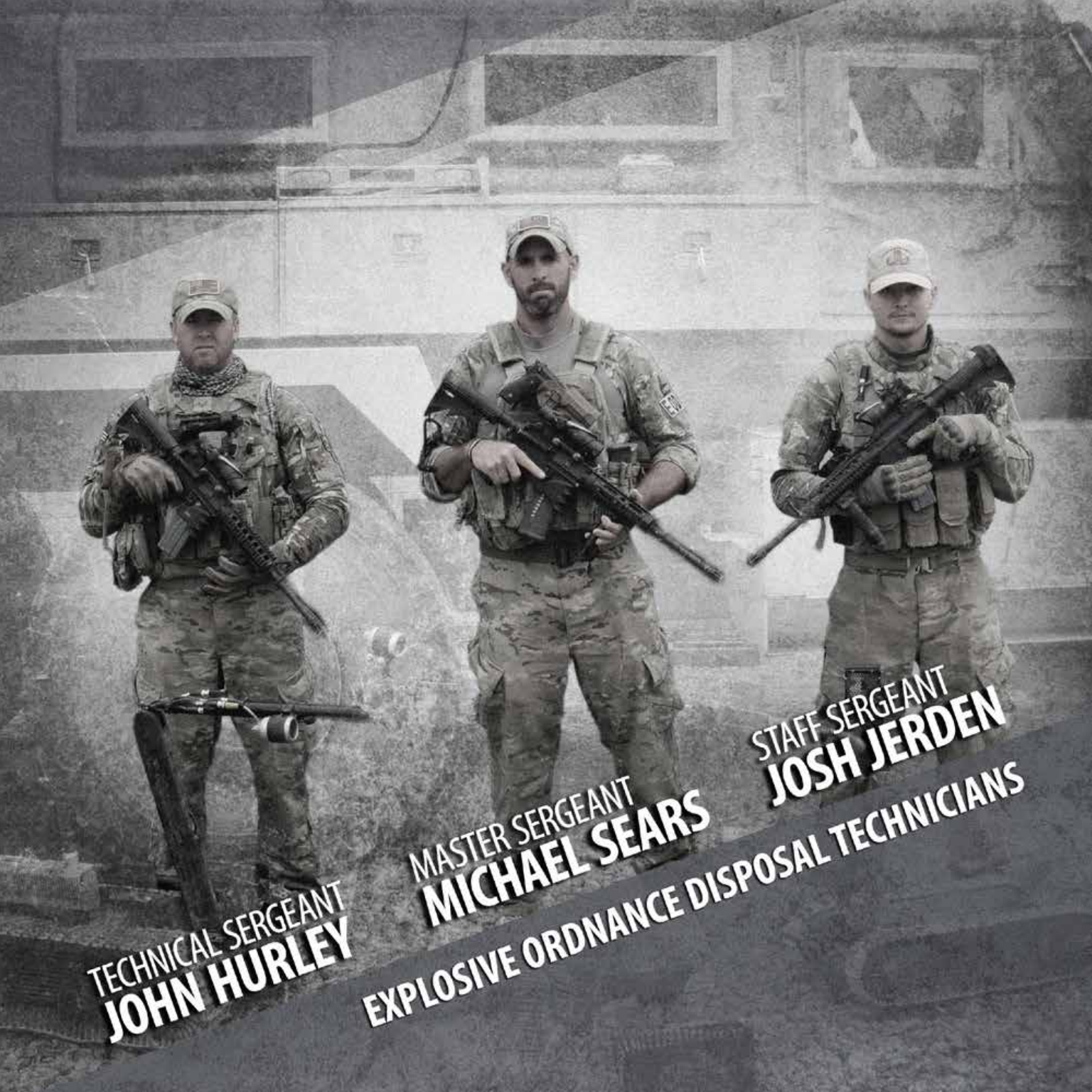
AEROSPACE PROPULSION CRAFTSMAN, FUELS SPECIALIST, PARALEGAL

Master Sgt. **Dominick Griego**, an Air Mobility Command fuels specialist; Tech. Sgt. **Austin Hardin**, the Air Force Materiel Command drive team NCO in charge; and Staff Sgt. **Mechele Fonck**, an Air Education and Training Command operations truck commander, deployed to Camp Phoenix, Afghanistan, in support of the Defense Contract Management Agency.

On Oct. 18, 2013, using two non-tactical vehicles, Griego, Hardin and Fonck suppressed the enemy when their vehicles were ambushed by a suicide vehicle-borne improvised explosive device (VBIED). At dusk of the drive mission, they departed from Kabul International Airport enroute to Camp Phoenix. Shortly after leaving the airport, Fonck's vehicle was hit by a VBIED, along with small and heavy weapons fire, disabling the vehicle. The impact of the explosion was so extreme it crumpled the vehicle's hood, shattered the windshield and blew out a rear passenger window. The second vehicle's windshield, driver's side door and rear windows were also blown out. The event rendered all the occupants unconscious. At the same time, the team received gunfire from insurgents within 50 meters of their position. After initially losing consciousness, Hardin, in vehicle two, recovered and began returning fire through the blown out windshield, while confirming with vehicle one there were no serious injuries. Hardin attempted to put the vehicle in drive, but the vehicle would not budge. As vehicle two began to take more fire to the rear and left side, Griego and Hardin again returned fire, and Griego advised Hardin to restart the stalled vehicle and directed a third occupant to engage the enemy.

As the vehicle lurched forward, Griego coordinated with the entire team and directed Hardin to pull the vehicle into a blocking position to allow cross-loading of vehicle one personnel. Fonck prepared for the cross-load of passengers, exited the vehicle and repositioned herself in the rear of vehicle two. She sighted her M-4 on the closest target through the blown-out rear window engaging the enemy and suppressing the enemy shooter. After vehicle one personnel loaded into vehicle two, rounds began slamming into the driver's side door. After returning more fire, Greigo and Hardin ensured accountability of all passengers, and they quickly sped away with Hardin holding his door shut with one arm while navigating the heavily damaged vehicle through traffic. Upon arrival at Camp Phoenix, Hardin ordered the Entry Control Point to open. Once medical personnel began treatment, Hardin ensured his team was treated first, disregarding his severe concussion and traumatic brain injury, which led to his eventual evacuation to Germany.

Griego, Hardin and Fonck's leadership, tactical knowledge and demonstration of true warrior ethos ultimately saved lives under extremely difficult conditions. For his actions, Griego was awarded a Combat Action Medal, a Bronze Star and the Purple Heart. Hardin and Fonck both were awarded the Bronze Star and Purple Heart.


TECHNICAL SERGEANT
JOHN HURLEY
MASTER SERGEANT
MICHAEL SEARS
STAFF SERGEANT
JOSH JERDEN
EXPLOSIVE ORDNANCE DISPOSAL TECHNICIANS

On Sept. 29, 2012, a three-man explosive ordnance disposal team, consisting of (then) Tech. Sgt. **Michael Sears**, (then) Staff Sgt. **John Hurley** and Staff Sgt. **Josh Jerden**, defeated two separate improvised explosive devices when their patrol came under heavy machine gun and sniper fire.

Eight to 10 insurgents sent rounds impacting one to three feet from the EOD vehicle, when Sears witnessed a rocket-propelled grenade fly within three feet of his truck's turret and then continue on to strike a Polish command mine-resistant, armored-protective vehicle. While Hurley provided cover fire, Sears sprinted through a wall of enemy gunfire across 50 feet of open terrain to reach a wounded Polish soldier. Sears dragged the wounded soldier to the west side of the vehicle to shield the exposed soldier from danger and administered tactical combat care for a partially amputated leg. Jerden, operating as the driver, moved the EOD vehicle to provide cover for Sears and the wounded soldier.

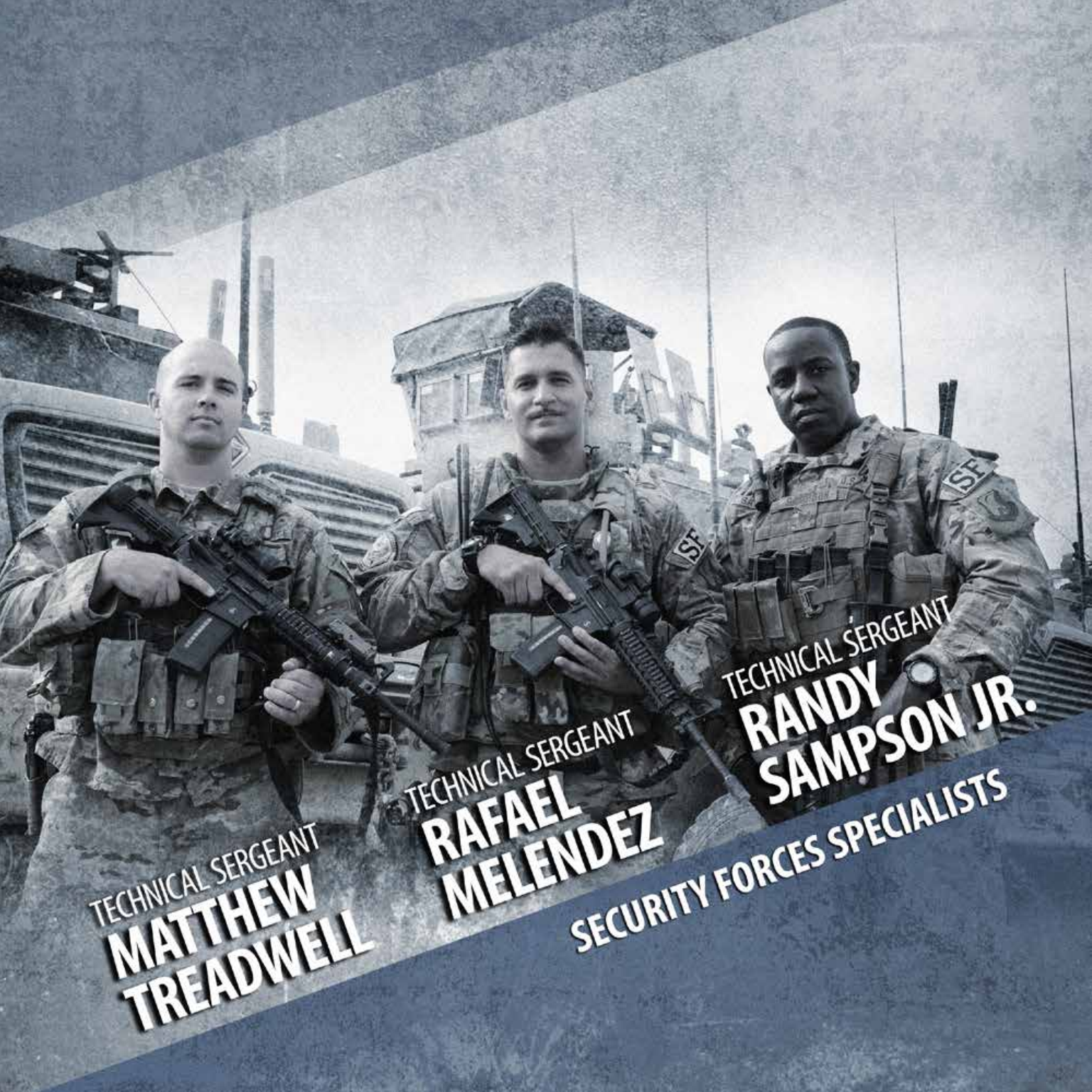
Despite the cover, several rounds of enemy gunfire impacted within feet of Sears and the Polish soldier's position and another RPG came within feet of Hurley in the EOD vehicle's turret. Sears immediately jumped onto the wounded soldier placing himself between the threat and his coalition partner and engaged the enemy with his M4 carbine rifle.

Sears recognized the wounded soldier's vital signs were deteriorating, but the Polish medics were pinned down and separated. Hurley began to provide covering fire from the turret as Sears twice braved a 100-foot wide open area, blanketed with intense small arms and RPG fire, in order to escort the medics to the wounded soldier. After ensuring the wounded soldier had medical aid, the team went on to suppress the attacking insurgents and ensure the expedient recovery of a disabled vehicle, allowing the wounded soldier to be quickly evacuated to Forward Operating Base Waghez for onward movement to Bagram Airfield Hospital.

The EOD team demonstrated extreme courage. Sears was awarded the the Silver Star and Purple Heart. Hurley and Jerden were both submitted for the Air Force Commendation with Valor.

I AM AN AMERICAN AIRMAN.
MY MISSION IS TO FLY, FIGHT, AND WIN.

I AM FAITHFUL TO A PROUD HERITAGE,
A TRADITION OF HONOR,
AND A LEGACY OF VALOR.


TECHNICAL SERGEANT
MATTHEW
TREADWELL
TECHNICAL SERGEANT
RAFAEL
MELENDEZ
TECHNICAL SERGEANT
RANDY
SAMPSON JR.
SECURITY FORCES SPECIALISTS

At 4:15 a.m., July 17, 2014, Tech. Sgts. **Rafael Melendez**, **Randy Sampson** and **Matthew Treadwell**, assigned to NATO Air Training Command-Afghanistan, were asleep in Kabul. Suddenly, loud explosions and the sound of small arms fire served as a startling wake-up call. Taliban insurgents were attacking from less than 400 meters outside the perimeter.

Each man donned protective gear and ran from his room, quickly meeting up outside. They grabbed a few more Airmen and jumped into a mine-resistant ambush-protected vehicle (MRAP) and headed outside the gate onto the encircling Afghan Air Force base. As they turned a corner toward the action, bullets and rocket-propelled grenades were going off everywhere. They stopped behind a building just 150 meters from the multi-story unfinished building housing the attackers.

As the MRAP's gunner laid down suppressive fire, Melendez stepped out of the vehicle and rendezvoused with an Afghan quick reaction force to de-conflict plans and avoid any confusion in the heat of battle. The combat veteran of eleven deployments served as a calming force to his U.S. and Afghan teammates – reminding them to relax and rely on their training. When he returned to the truck, Treadwell and Sampson asked to get to a closer position and use Treadwell's advanced optics to get good shots at the attackers.

Kicking in doors and clearing each room in a long hallway, the two sergeants made their way from the south side to the north side of an AAF building, where they took position in a room just 100 meters away from the gunfire. For two hours, Treadwell and Sampson used grazing fire to keep the enemy heads down and called out positions to the heavy gunners back at the forward operating base's towers. At one point, the room lit up with gunfire. Bullets and rocket-propelled grenades screamed all around as the two security forces Airmen alternated between taking cover and returning fire.

Ultimately, an Afghan-led quick reaction force arrived at the attackers' position and cleared the remaining insurgents. Covered in broken shards of glass, Sampson and Treadwell left the building and rejoined Melendez to perform sweeps and return to the forward operating base.

Melendez, Sampson and Treadwell demonstrated leadership by example and acted with courage in risking their lives to get close to a determined enemy fighting from an elevated position of cover. Together with a team of U.S. and Afghan security forces, they eliminated the enemy and zero coalition casualties were suffered in a fight that lasted more than four hours. They were each awarded the Air Force Combat Action Medal and two received the Bronze Star Medal with Valor.

TECHNICAL SERGEANT
THOMAS BAUHS
COMBAT CONTROLLER

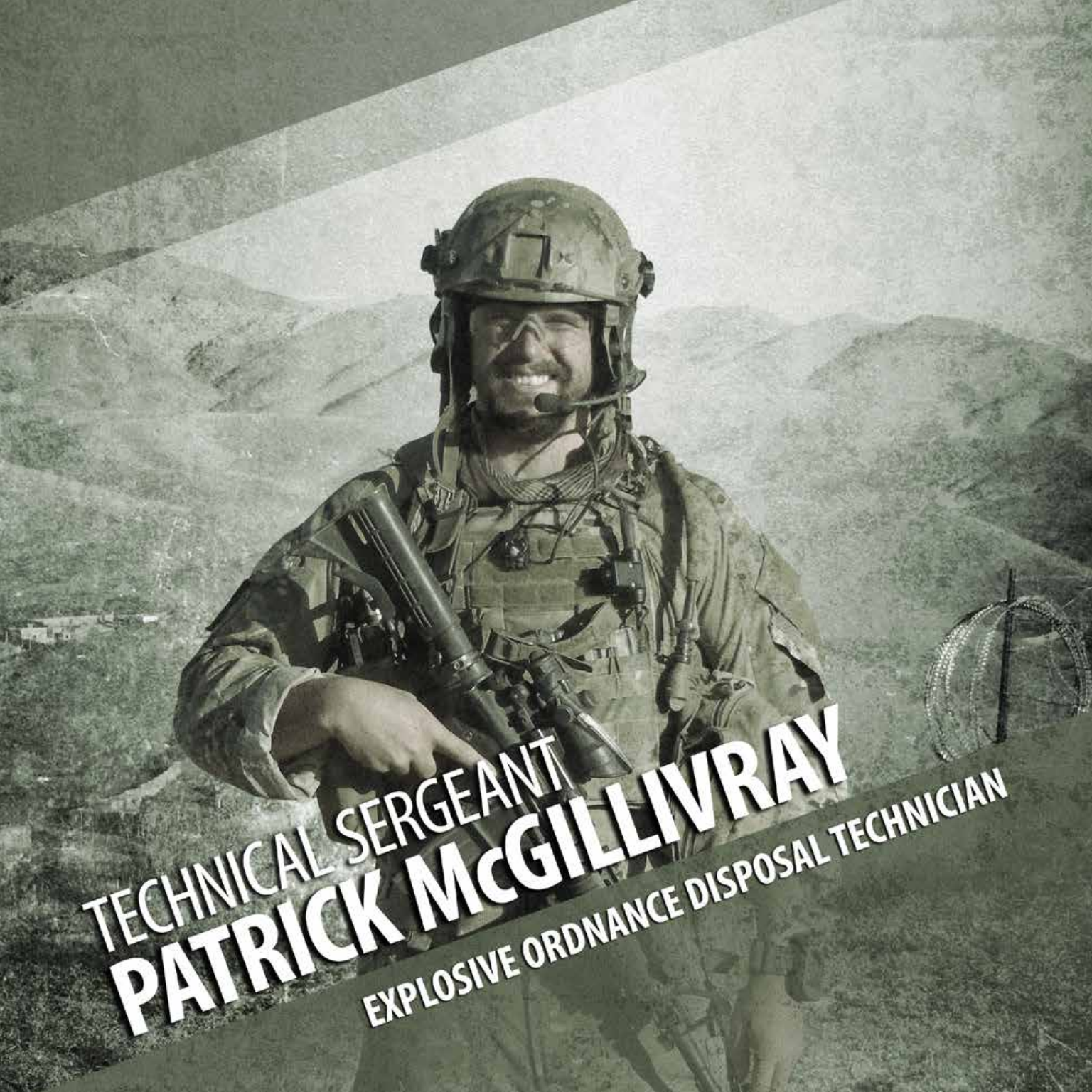
On June 1, 2014, Tech. Sgt. **Thomas Bauhs**, a combat controller attached to an Army Special Forces team, was conducting a large-scale combined clearance mission with Afghan National Security Forces in an enemy-dominated valley in central Nangarhar Province. During this operation, Bauhs' team was ambushed by more than 50 insurgents firing from multiple fighting positions. A 12-hour firefight ensued, which involved repeated insurgent attacks using AK-47s, heavy machine guns, rocket-propelled grenades and recoilless rifles. Six hours into the firefight, Bauhs and the ground force commander were on a rooftop when their position received a sustained barrage of heavy machine gun and sniper fire from multiple locations.

Bauhs returned fire with his M203 grenade launcher while calling two F-16 Fighting Falcon aircraft onto enemy positions. As he prepared to control an airstrike, an enemy 82-millimeter recoilless rifle round impacted within feet of his position. The violent blast left Bauhs briefly incapacitated, knocking him from his feet and filling the air with dust and smoke. Despite his condition, he quickly directed the release of two 500-pound bombs onto enemy locations.

Shortly after the "cleared hot" call and within 30 seconds of the first blast, a second 82-mm round impacted three feet above Bauhs' head on the opposite side of a wall he was taking cover behind. The blast collapsed part of the wall onto Bauhs and again drove him to the ground. Bauhs staggered back to his feet with a perforated eardrum and traumatic brain injury, passed control of the aircraft to another combat controller and then rendered first aid to the wounded, unconscious ground force commander. In this exposed position with heavy enemy machine gun fire impacting within feet of his position, Bauhs moved the ground force commander to nearby cover and radioed for aid. After two teammates arrived they moved their wounded leader to a nearby building.

While his teammates continued medical care, Bauhs coordinated with another combat controller for the medical evacuation. He identified a suitable landing zone for the helicopter evacuation, and provided the safest arrival and departure route. Throughout the remainder of the firefight, and despite his injuries, Bauhs synchronized and controlled nine additional air-to-ground engagements. He coordinated close air support from an AC-130W Stinger II orbiting overhead and AH-64 Apache helicopters to conduct strafing runs on multiple locations. Bauhs continued coordinating air support to protect the remainder of the team while leading his teammates to the exfiltration landing zone.

Bauhs' quick reactions and calm demeanor under heavy enemy fire, despite injuries, resulted in 11 enemies killed and no further friendly casualties. He was awarded the Bronze Star Medal with Valor for his actions.



TECHNICAL SERGEANT PATRICK McGILLIVRAY

EXPLOSIVE ORDNANCE DISPOSAL TECHNICIAN

On July 13, 2013, while conducting a patrol in Wardak Province, Afghanistan, Tech. Sgt. **Patrick McGillivray** and his team leader were ambushed by insurgents.

As an explosive ordnance disposal team member embedded with Special Forces, McGillivray was trained to react coolly in stressful situations. As the insurgents attacked from two sides with machine gun fire, he scrambled for cover behind a taxi cab and immediately engaged the enemy.

Within a short time, the volume of enemy fire made the taxi ineffective as cover. While still under fire he sprinted to a nearby all-terrain vehicle and retrieved an M-240B machine gun and ammunition, repelling the attack and safeguarding more than 100 locals.

Several weeks later, McGillivray and his team were attacked again while conducting another patrol. A rocket-propelled grenade slammed into the side of McGillivray's armored vehicle piercing its hull and showering the vehicle's interior with fragmentation. Both the driver and vehicle commander suffered serious wounds from the explosion. McGillivray, along with his team leader and a medic, quickly removed the wounded from the vehicle and went to work to stop their bleeding.

In the midst of caring for the wounded, McGillivray's position came under fire again. McGillivray continued to render aid and helped carry two wounded soldiers more than 200 yards to a helicopter landing zone.

Finally, on Aug. 25, 2013, McGillivray and his team were engaged by 25 enemy fighters. The enemy attackers were fortified in six separate fighting positions, forming a potentially lethal "kill box." Despite being outmanned, McGillivray maintained his position and engaged the enemy. The fierce fire fight lasted six hours. In the end the team was able to repel the attack without a single casualty.

As a result of his courage, heroism and selfless action under fire, McGillivray was nominated for the Bronze Star and Army Commendation Medal with Valor.

TECHNICAL SERGEANT
MATTHEW McKENNA
COMBAT CONTROLLER

Tech. Sgt. **Matthew McKenna**, a combat controller, and his Army Special Forces team, were aligned with an Afghan special operations partner force in Kandahar Province to push back determined insurgent forces from retaking control of the province.

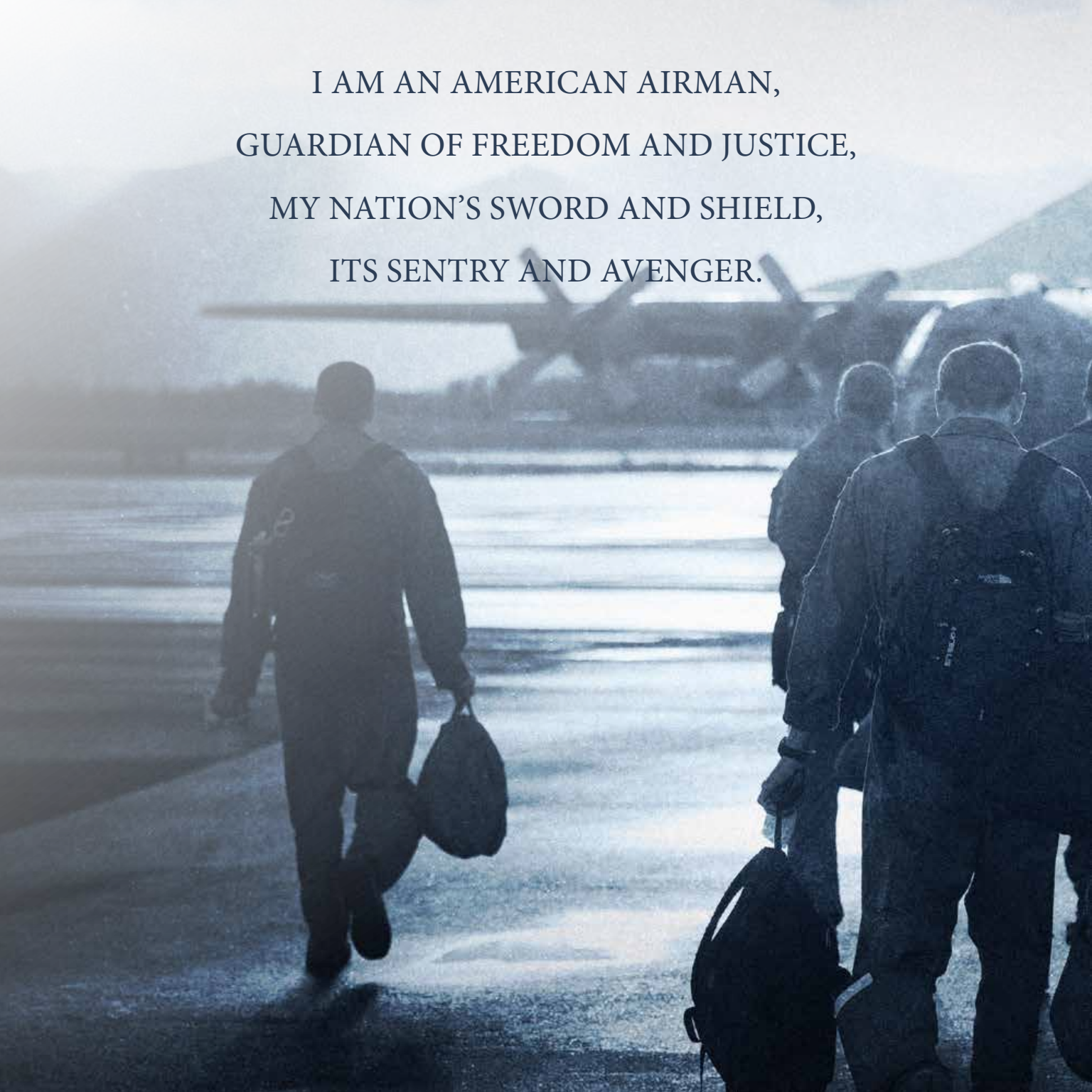
On Sept. 12, 2013, the team was tasked to perform a high-risk clearing operation in Mirza Kalay village against a known improvised explosive device facilitation ring and enemy location with strength estimates between 40 and 60 well-armed fighters. Immediately upon infiltration the assault force was in heavy contact.

McKenna controlled air and ground assets to execute air strikes on 10 insurgents in fighting positions, preventing a catastrophic ambush. The enemy waited for reinforcements then maneuvered and initiated an ambush from dominant fighting positions, pinning down friendly elements. On several occasions and with no regard for his personal safety, McKenna moved from cover, exposing himself to intense machine gun and rocket-propelled grenade fire, to locate friendly positions trapped by enemy fire before calling in air support.

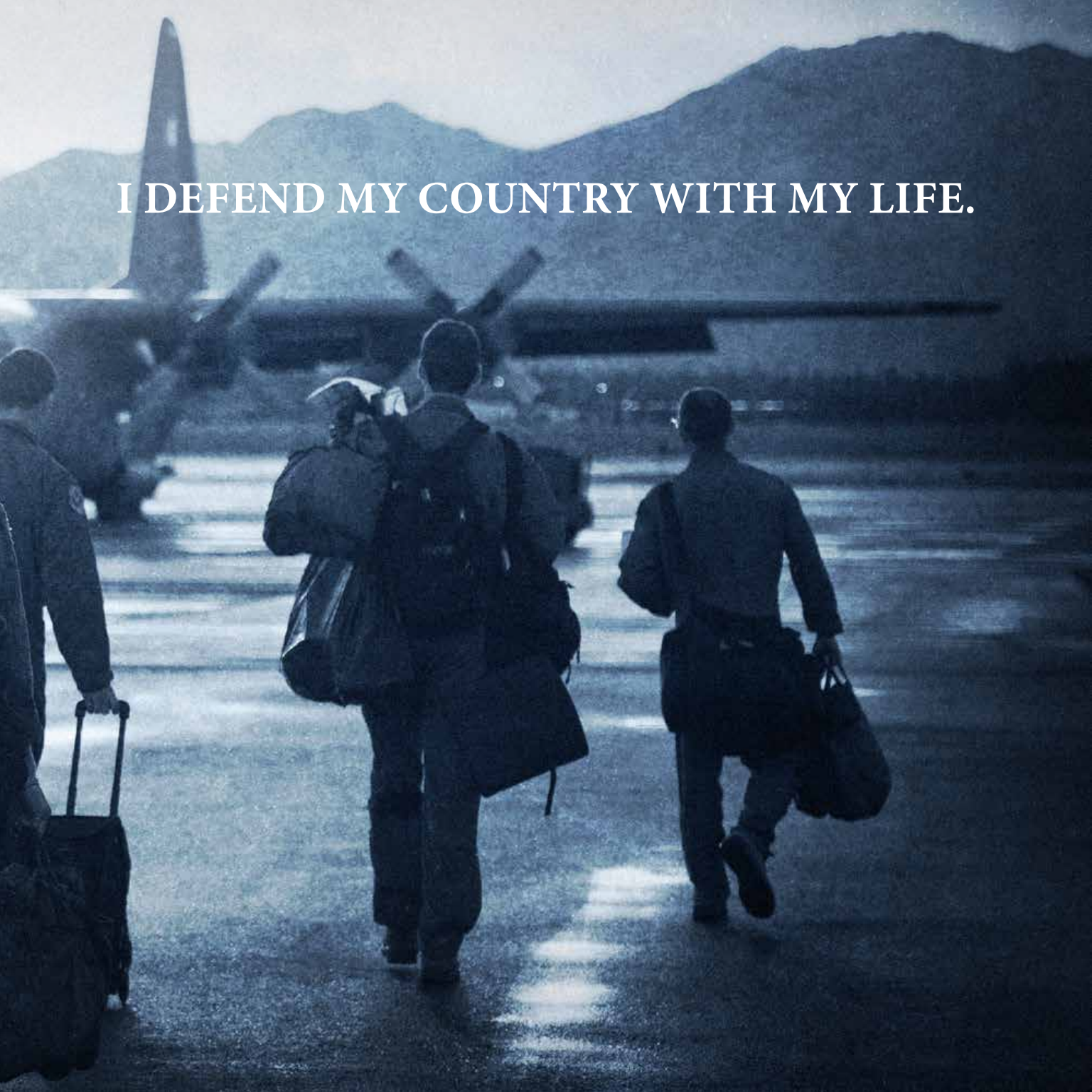
As the battle continued friendly forces, now outnumbered three-to-one, fought for their lives against an estimated 125 insurgent reinforcements. Dangerously low on ammunition, under heavy fire and blown to the ground by enemy recoilless rifle fire, McKenna coordinated two precise air drops of ammunition and supplies to keep friendly elements in the fight and prevented a potential overrun of their positions.

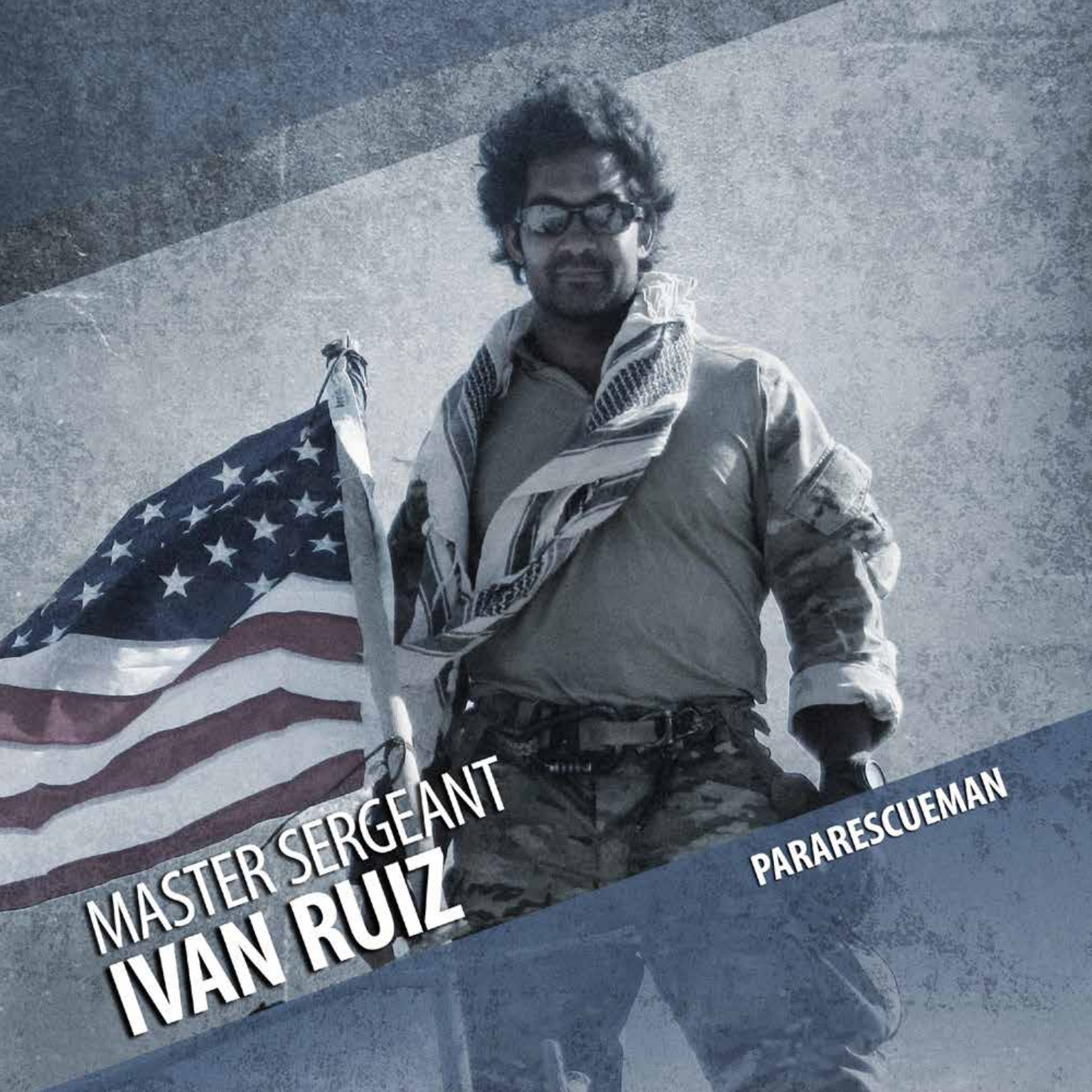
McKenna's control of air power, integration of reconnaissance assets and direct engagement with the enemy throughout the 13-hour battle ensured the survival of friendly forces against a formidable enemy, enabled his team to clear two kilometers of rough terrain, beat back three enemy counter attacks and contributed substantially to an incredible 103 enemy fighters killed in action.

McKenna was awarded the Silver Star Medal for his actions in the Kandahar Province and for his gallantry in the face of a determined enemy.



I AM AN AMERICAN AIRMAN,
GUARDIAN OF FREEDOM AND JUSTICE,
MY NATION'S SWORD AND SHIELD,
ITS SENTRY AND AVENGER.


I DEFEND MY COUNTRY WITH MY LIFE.


MASTER SERGEANT
IVAN RUIZ
PARARESCUEMAN

On Dec.10, 2013, Master Sgt. **Ivan Ruiz**, a pararescueman, was attached as the lone rescue specialist to an Army Special Forces team assaulting a Taliban stronghold. The team inserted into the Mushan village area in no-visibility conditions due to the CH-47 Chinooks creating a dust and sand cloud at the insertion point. Despite this, Ruiz quickly gathered his element of Afghan commandos and moved rapidly to the objective. While Ruiz and his element moved, an orbiting flight of AH-64 Apache helicopters observed armed insurgents maneuvering into attack positions and began engaging with 30 millimeter cannon fire. With the element of surprise lost, Ruiz followed his Afghan clearing element into the courtyard of a target compound and breached the main building. Four inhabitants emerged appearing to surrender. Without warning, the surrendering insurgents drew weapons and began firing. Four U.S. service members and 10 Afghan commandos engaged in a point-blank firefight which ended with the elimination of all four insurgents.

Gathering in the courtyard, Ruiz and two U.S. team members faced two small mud huts. Ruiz focused on one hut, while his teammates oriented on the other. Instantly, an armed insurgent filled the doorway of one hut 20 meters away. Ruiz instinctively fired his rifle, neutralizing the enemy fighter. Simultaneously, a barrage of machine gun fire erupted from the second hut, wounding the two team members near Ruiz. Ruiz laid down cover fire in an attempt to move closer to his fallen comrades but he was unable to advance against the high volume of enemy fire. He shouted for reinforcement but the Afghan commandos were trapped behind cover. Disregarding his own safety, Ruiz crossed the open courtyard toward his wounded team members.

Without assistance he engaged enemy forces as they blasted machine gun fire at him across the compound. Ruiz continued to suppress the enemy fighters with his own fire until finally joined by a U.S. team member. When his team member threw a grenade into the hut, he seized the advantage and closed the distance to his wounded comrades. Seconds later insurgents in the hut responded with two grenades of their own. Prone and unable to maneuver, Ruiz was saved by an unpulled pin as the first grenade landed within feet of him while the other grenade detonated a few meters away.

Ruiz pressed through intense fire to reach the two wounded soldiers and dragged them to relative safety. Ruiz then treated his wounded team members and packaged them for transport on an incoming helicopter. Rejoining his assault team, Ruiz treated three commandos wounded by grenade shrapnel and continued to clear enemy compounds until the operation ended.

Ruiz's actions saved the lives of two U.S. team members and contributed to the death of 11 enemy fighters. Ruiz received the Air Force Cross Medal for his heroic actions against an armed enemy.

TECHNICAL SERGEANT DAVID SHEA

SPECIAL MISSIONS AVIATOR

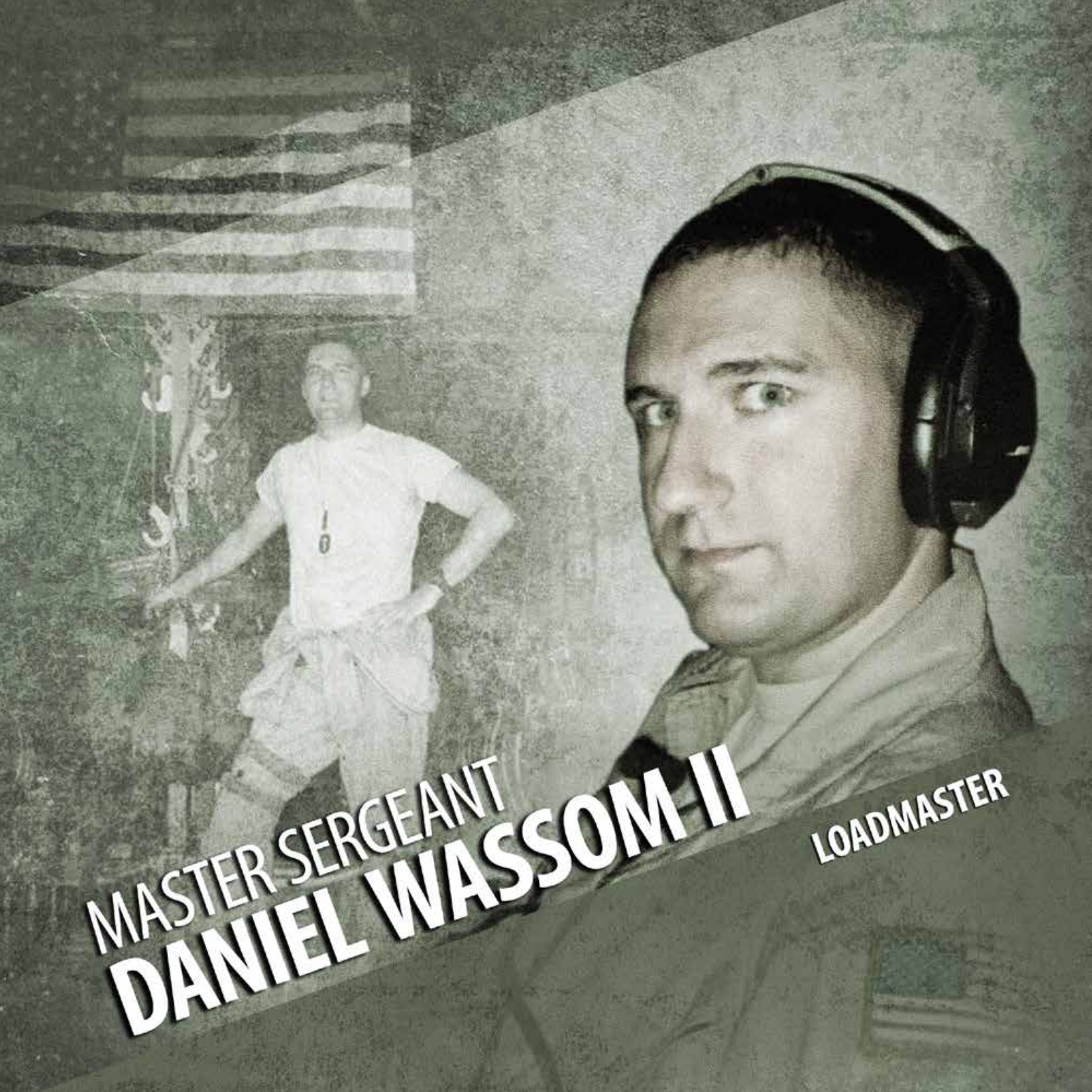
Tech. Sgt. **David Shea** is a flight engineer for the CV-22 Osprey. On Dec. 21, 2013, he manned the ramp-mounted tail gun during an attempted rescue of American citizens from a densely populated United Nations compound in Central Africa.

What began as a routine approach and landing quickly spiraled into a near disaster as Shea's aircraft came under heavy gunfire from ground forces. Within seconds the Osprey sustained severe structural damage and four military personnel on board received life-threatening injuries. Despite multiple ruptured fuel tanks, hydraulic systems failures and electrical outages, Shea successfully directed the maneuver of his aircraft away from the weapons engagement area.

During egress from the threat, while manning the tail gun and attempting to track a sister aircraft in the formation, he was struck in the chest plate by a small arms round. Shea quickly recovered from the shock of the ballistic impact, regrouped and provided medical aid to the most critically wounded in the aircraft. While holding his wounded teammate's arterial bleeding at bay with one hand, he keyed the microphone with his other, passing on timely and accurate assessments to the pilots about the aircraft's state, ensuring rapid identification of a massive fuel leak.

Shea simultaneously conducted a thorough battle damage assessment of the aircraft while continuing to deliver medical assistance to the wounded. Stabilizing the most gravely injured for continued flight became priority number one since all divert airfields lay hundreds of miles away. Shea was able to tend to the four injured Special Forces personnel during the 400-mile transit through Africa without any further incident. After landing, he personally ensured the rapid transfer of the critically wounded to the medical support and hospital transport teams before taking care of his own injuries.

Shea was awarded the Air Force Mackay Trophy and submitted for the Distinguished Flying Cross for his actions.


MASTER SERGEANT
DANIEL WASSOM II
LOADMASTER

As a tornado demolished Master Sgt. **Daniel Wassom**'s house, he and his wife, Suzanne, tried to protect their 5- and 7-year-old daughters by using their own bodies as shields. It worked. Their children survived – but Dan did not.

With winds reaching nearly 200 miles per hour, the devastating EF-4 tornado smashed into Vilonia, Arkansas, on April 27, 2014, killing 16 people. The twister demolished 50 of 56 homes in the Wassom's subdivision, as well as nearly half the businesses in the town of 3,800. Known as "Bud" to his family and close friends, 31-year-old Wassom died while hovering over his 5-year-old daughter.

Wassom was a C-130 Hercules loadmaster evaluator with the Air National Guard's 189th Airlift Wing at Little Rock Air Force Base, Arkansas. Joining the Air Force as a patriotic calling shortly after the terrorist attacks of 9/11, he followed in his dad's footsteps. The senior Dan Wassom was a C-130 Hercules maintenance crew chief at Little Rock AFB before retiring from active duty. He still works at the base as a civilian in the 19th Maintenance Group, just minutes from his son's unit.

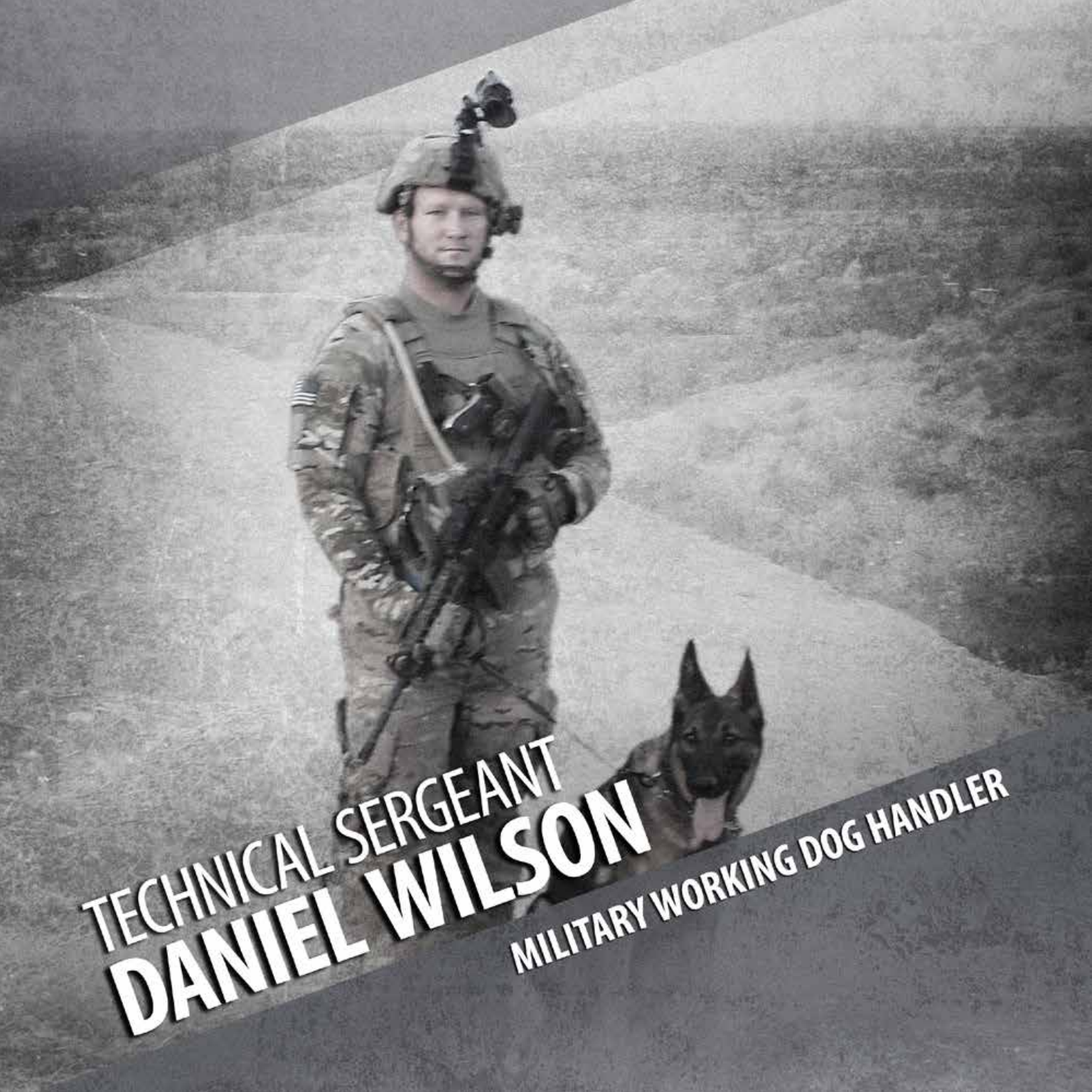
A decorated Airman, Wassom earned an Air Medal during his deployment to Kuwait – a combat tour he volunteered to do. He was supporting Operations Enduring Freedom and Iraqi Freedom in 2010. According to his award citation, Wassom flew 16 successful combat missions -- conducted day and night under the threat of enemy anti-aircraft artillery and surface-to-air missiles -- over the war-torn countries of Iraq and Afghanistan, executing multiple, flawless contingency airdrops. His parents say, the only thing Wassom treasured more than his Air Force career was his family. So while his death came as a shock to those who knew and loved him, the way he died – protecting his family – surprised no one.

Wassom's wife told his parents that he remained calm, cool and collected even as the monster twister began to consume their 2,300-square-foot home. As Wassom bent his 6-foot-2 frame over his youngest daughter, forming a semi-protective cocoon over her, a heavy structural beam struck the back of his neck and a one-by-four impaled his chest. His daughter lost a toe on her left foot and suffered a serious injury to her right shoulder, but she, along with her mother and sister, survived.

Wassom's last mission … accomplished.

"He was the best daddy I'd ever seen, and he loved his wife with all his heart," said his mom, Pam Wassom, who along with Dan Sr. resides only 20 minutes from where their son's home used to stand. "He took to parenthood as naturally as breathing air," she said. "He was involved in every aspect of those girls' lives. He was their hero, and he proved it with his last breath."

Wassom was posthumously awarded the Airman's Medal, along with a Meritorious Service Medal and the Arkansas Distinguished Service Medal from the governor of Arkansas. Additionally, a Little Rock AFB street now bears his name. -- MSGT DAN WASSOM ROAD.


TECHNICAL SERGEANT
DANIEL WILSON
MILITARY WORKING DOG HANDLER

In September 2013 Staff Sgt. **Daniel Wilson** deployed to Bagram Air Base, Afghanistan, to the 455th Security Forces Group as a military working dog handler. Wilson and MWD Dan completed more than 60 outside-the-wire missions, working with Army Pathfinders, 1st Calvary and an Air Force security forces unit, call sign "The Reapers." Through each of these complex missions, Wilson and Dan recovered 14 landmines, 12 rockets and three improvised explosive devices.

On the night of Sept. 10, 2013, Wilson reported a lone gunman standing on their intended route of travel. While reporting this situation, Wilson's K-9 spotter witnessed the gunman running away from their position after detecting the movement of the patrol. Wilson released Dan to pursue and attack the unknown gunman. During the chase Dan caught the odor of a 107mm mortar and alerted on the IED. Wilson quickly noticed Dan's response and spotted the gunman in a nearby tree observing the situation. Wilson engaged the insurgent with his M4 carbine, knocking him out of the tree. The area instantly erupted in automatic machine gun fire from approximately 12 insurgents from multiple directions. During the firefight, Wilson observed his spotter lying approximately 10 feet away from the IED. While providing suppressive fire with minimal cover, Wilson made contact with his spotter and warned him of the imminent danger of the IED. After approximately 20 minutes of continuous small arms fire, Wilson's fire team broke contact with the enemy to regroup with the squad leader. After Wilson and Dan cleared a narrow path, he directed his fire team to relocate. Wilson then recalled the other two fire teams to his safe position, where they quickly established 360 degree security, coupled with laying down suppressive fire on the enemy. After almost 90 minutes of intense combat, Wilson secured a route back to the safety of the squad's mine-resistant ambush-protected vehicles. It was later discovered there were vehicle-borne IEDs on motorcycles in the Bagram Security Zone along with a possible insurgent "hit" out for a MWD without a tail. Dan does not have a tail.

Almost one month after the Sept. 10 event, Wilson and Dan went on a similar mission. On Oct. 9, 2013, with the "hit on a MWD without a tail" information in his mind, Wilson maintained acute awareness of his surroundings. His keen observation skills helped identify a motorcycle traveling at a high rate of speed and gunning for Dan. Wilson immediately put Dan's safety first and shoved the MWD out of the path of the oncoming motorcycle. He absorbed the impact of the oncoming motorcyclist intent on harming Dan. This accident resulted in critical injuries to Wilson's shoulders, knee and ankles.

Wilson's courage under fire and constant vigilance prevented two terrible situations from becoming catastrophic. His actions directly contributed to saving the lives of 12 Airmen as well as his partner, Dan. For his extraordinary actions, dedication to the mission and service to his country, Wilson was awarded the Air Force Commendation Medal with Valor and the Air Force Combat Action Medal.

I AM AN AMERICAN AIRMAN:
WINGMAN, LEADER, WARRIOR.
I WILL NEVER LEAVE AN AIRMAN BEHIND,
I WILL NEVER FALTER,
AND I WILL NOT FAIL.

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