

PRESENTED BY THE  
UNITED STATES AIR FORCE



# PORTRAITS IN COURAGE

VOL 8





# THE CHIEF OF STAFF'S

## PORTRAITS IN COURAGE

Led by Airmen and powered by innovation, our United States Air Force remains the greatest air force the world has ever known. Our advantage is not really a secret. It is our people – our Airmen. With this in mind, we are humbled to share with you this eighth volume of Portraits in Courage.

Each story in this book reminds us of what it truly means to serve. They remind us that our core values are more than slogans. They are hard choices that are made in the face of real danger. Our Airmen are faced with situations like this each and every day around the globe. And 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 Airmen will sound familiar to you. Perhaps they will remind you of a neighbor, a family member, a co-worker or friend that serves. Whether they fly airplanes, defuse improvised explosive devices, fix engines or provide support to our warfighters, all of our Airmen are truly 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 uniform, these stories inspire further dedication to our creed, to our mission, and to each other. For those who depend on us, we believe these stories show that our Airmen are truly real-life heroes. They have earned our highest degree of trust. Our Nation's security is in their hands and they stood the watch proudly.



**MARK A. WELSH III**

General, USAF  
Chief of Staff



**JAMES A. CODY**

Chief Master Sergeant  
of the Air Force







“Progress occurs when courageous, skillful leaders seize the opportunity to change things for the better.”

**HARRY S. TRUMAN**

On the evening of April 17, 2013, Cadet First Lieutenants **QUIANNA A. SAMUELS**, **ALISON R. NORDLANDER**, and **ASHLYN J. MCNEELY** stopped in West, Texas, en route to Dallas. The three had just finished their Air Force Reserve Officer Training Corps Leadership Laboratory requirements on the Baylor University campus in Waco, Texas. As they walked from their car, a deafening blast shook the air and a mushroom cloud climbed into the evening sky, the result of a massive explosion at a fertilizer plant one mile away.

Cadet Samuels, a December 2012 graduate of Baylor's School of Nursing, and Cadets Nordlander and McNeely, senior and junior nursing students respectively, immediately ran toward the explosion. On scene they found utter annihilation and total chaos, with multiple fires raging and the threat of additional explosions imminent. The trio's training instinctively took over. They quickly assessed the situation and pulled survivors from the rubble of the West Rest Haven nursing home. They established a triage area for immediate treatment, gathered medical supplies, and helped direct transportation of passengers to area hospitals.

For more than four hours, these future Air Force officers treated dozens of injured people as fires continued to burn through the night and heavy smoke blanketed the site. Only after adequate rescue and support personnel had arrived did they report to the hospital to be treated for smoke and chemical inhalation. Cadet McNeely performed these actions while wearing a cast from a fractured ankle, reinjuring herself during the rescue.

Cadets Samuels, Nordlander and McNeely displayed leadership, courage and professionalism in handling an extremely traumatic disaster. While at least 14 lives were lost that night, countless others were undoubtedly saved by their quick actions. For their voluntary acts of valor, disregarding personal safety in the face of great peril, all three were awarded the AFROTC Gold Valor Award, the highest honor bestowed upon an AFROTC cadet.

Second Lieutenants Nordlander and Samuels received their commissions in May of 2013.



**CADET FIRST LIEUTENANTS**

**ASHLYN MCNEELY**  
**ALISON NORDLANDER**  
**QUIANNA SAMUELS**

**AFROTC NURSING STUDENTS**  
**BAYLOR UNIVERSITY, WACO, TX**





STAFF SERGEANT  
**MARK HAJDUK**

SENIOR AIRMAN  
**GARRETT AMOROSE**

**EXPLOSIVE ORDNANCE DISPOSAL TECHNICIANS**  
354TH CIVIL ENGINEER SQD, EIELSON AFB - ALASKA  
48TH CIVIL ENGINEER SQD, RAF LAKENHEATH - ENGLAND

On February 7, 2012, Staff Sergeant **MARK HAJDUK**, Senior Airman **GARRETT AMOROSE** and their Explosive Ordnance Disposal (EOD) team were tasked with clearing the region of any Improvised Explosive Device (IED) during the second day of an air assault in support of Alpha Company, 1-5 Infantry Battalion, 1-25 Stryker Brigade Combat Team.

After their team cleared their eighth IED that day, a massive explosion detonated 40 meters away. The team responded immediately and found a scene of confusion with several startled but uninjured soldiers lying on the ground near the blast site.

While surveying the damage, Sergeant Hajduk and Airman Amorose heard screams from a 15-foot deep well. They discovered a seriously injured soldier who had stepped on the victim-operated pressure plate IED and absorbed the worst of the blast. The soldier suffered a traumatic amputation of both legs and a partially amputated arm. The two Airmen followed their team leader into the well and they rendered first aid to the injured soldier. Airman Amorose applied two tourniquets to the soldier's mangled left leg and stopped the bleeding while his team leader did the same for the soldier's right leg.

Sergeant Hajduk and Airman Amorose checked the soldier for hidden injuries, stabilized his shattered arm and kept the soldier alive while the company's medic climbed into the well. With the additional support, the team strapped the soldier to a stretcher to carefully lift him out, with his wounded arm tightly immobilized against his body. Airman Amorose was the last to leave the well, supporting the soldier from below, while Sergeant Hajduk led the clearance of a safe landing zone for an inbound medevac helicopter. Together the team fought to keep the soldier awake and alert until he could be transferred to the rescue aircraft.

Sergeant Hajduk and Airman Amorose demonstrated extreme courage. In the weeks to come, the injured soldier battled for his life and survived. Trauma surgeons reported that the on-scene combat lifesaving efforts gave the soldier the chance to survive.

On September 14, 2012, a four-man rescue team, consisting of Combat Rescue Officer Major **Matthew Komatsu**, Pararescuemen Master Sergeant **Paul Barendregt**, and Technical Sergeants **Kyle Minshew** and **Dan Warren**, received a call for help following an insurgent attack on Bastion Airfield in Afghanistan. The number of casualties was unknown.

Despite a lack of reliable intelligence, the team headed across the airfield. Amidst a blazing fuel farm and attack helicopters hovering overhead, they encountered a firefight between a British Quick Response Force and several insurgents.

The team integrated with the British force as they learned about their only casualty, the commanding officer of Marine Attack Squadron 211. The Airmen sprinted uphill the length of a football-field in full view of enemy fire toward the casualties. Sergeants Minshew and Warren treated the wounded for shrapnel and fragmentation injuries as the team cleared through a maze of shipping containers, tents and hazardous materials. Using night vision goggles, Sergeants Barendregt and Warren identified enemy movement in a bug-out shelter; they stood cover while the British element assaulted the bunker, killing five insurgents.

Major Komatsu established radio communications with the attack helicopters, enabling air strikes that would kill three more insurgents and critically wound another. As the team cleared several hazardous close quarters, Sergeant Warren encountered a surviving insurgent clutching a grenade. He engaged the insurgent with his rifle, thereby neutralizing the threat.

After six hours of intense operations into uncertain territory, the team ended the night by overseeing the dignified transfer of Lt. Col. Christopher Raible, the Marine Attack Squadron Commander killed during the attack. Fourteen enemy insurgents were dead and seven lives were saved. For their actions, the team was awarded Bronze Stars with Valor Award.



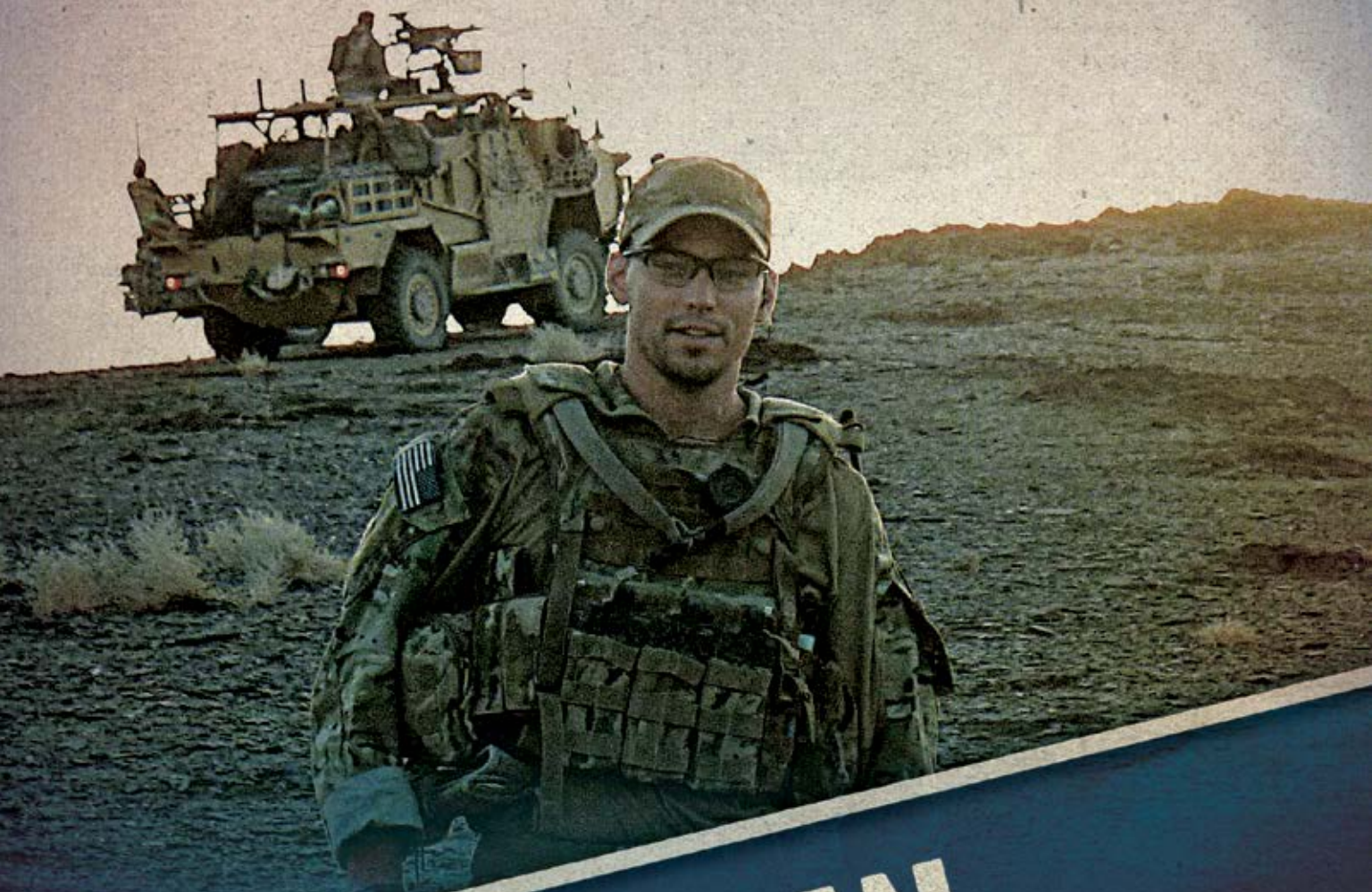


MAJOR  
**MATTHEW KOMATSU**  
MASTER SERGEANT  
**PAUL BARENDREGT**

TECHNICAL SERGEANT  
**KYLE MINSHEW**  
TECHNICAL SERGEANT  
**DAN WARREN**

**COMBAT RESCUE OFFICER & PARARESCUEMEN**  
212TH RESCUE SQUADRON  
JOINT BASE ELMENDORF-RICHARDSON, AK





MASTER SERGEANT  
ANDREW

**ADRIAN**

EXPLOSIVE ORDNANCE DISPOSAL TECHNICIAN  
673RD CIVIL ENGINEER SQUADRON  
JOINT BASE ELMENDORF-RICHARDSON, AK

On June 15, 2012, Technical Sergeant **ANDREW ADRIAN**, an Airman who specializes in Explosive Ordnance Disposal (EOD), partnered with British Special Operation Forces and Afghan Commandos on a mission to sweep and clear enemy compounds. While inside an empty compound, two commandos moved to enter a doorway in which Sergeant Adrian recognized an undetected Improvised Explosive Device (IED). Ignoring the threat to his well-being, Sergeant Adrian sprinted to the commandos, pulling them away from the device. His quick and fearless actions prevented the death of the two commandos and protected the remainder of the unit from grave injury.

During another mission, Sergeant Adrian was actively disarming an IED in the entryway of a compound when a member of his team stepped into an uncleared area, triggering an IED only seven feet behind him. Sergeant Adrian saw his Army teammate blown into the air by the force of the blast. Disregarding his own safety, Sergeant Adrian crossed the uncleared area to reach his wounded team member. He quickly stabilized the soldier's shattered leg, and with the help of a medic, moved his teammate to a cleared area for rapid medical evacuation.

Sergeant Adrian returned to the compound to collect seven pieces of crucial evidence from the device that maimed his team member. The evidence he collected enabled forensic experts to build a profile of the insurgent network that constructed and placed the IED. This ultimately allowed for more precise targeting and improved counter-IED tactics in the volatile Regional Command-Southwest area of operations. For his bravery over the course of his deployment, Sergeant Adrian was awarded his third Bronze Star and the Air Force Combat Action Medal. He has been nominated for the Army Commendation Medal with Valor.



While deployed in support of Operation Enduring Freedom, combat controller Staff Sergeant **MICHAEL BLOUT**, averted catastrophe during high-risk combat operations on October 23, 2012. Sergeant Blout and his team entered Chak Valley, a known hotbed of insurgent activity in Afghanistan's Wardak Province. The team split into two elements to patrol through dense, jungle-like undergrowth where one of the elements was ambushed and immediately took casualties.

As he approached a small clearing in the foliage, the team's chief warrant officer suffered multiple gunshot wounds to his chest and legs. While enemy forces poured unrelenting machine gun and rocket propelled grenades from a nearby tree line, Sergeant Blout, without regard for his own life, dashed into the clearing between his teammates and the enemy.

Sergeant Blout suppressed enemy fighting positions with rifle fire, coordinated AC-130W attacks along the enemy-held tree line, and called for an urgent medical evacuation flight of helicopters to land on his position. As the helicopters made their final approach, enemy fighters increased their rate of fire. Sergeant Blout aborted the aircraft before they could touch down and summoned three teammates to suppress enemy fire sweeping the landing zone. Sergeant Blout then resumed the evacuation of their mortally-wounded comrade as he summoned the helicopters and coordinated an assault against an enemy machine gun position.

Sergeant Blout's actions in the clearing prevented the loss of a coalition aircraft and prevented the friendly position from being overrun. His heroic actions earned him a Silver Star.



STAFF SERGEANT  
**MICHAEL**

**BLOUT**

**COMBAT CONTROLLER**  
23RD SPECIAL TACTICS SQUADRON, HURLBURT FIELD, FL





TECHNICAL SERGEANT  
**RONNIE**

**BRICKEY**

EXPLOSIVE ORDNANCE DISPOSAL TECHNICIAN  
USAF SPECIAL OPERATIONS SCHOOL, HURLBURT FIELD, FL



On May 31, 2011, while conducting a routine sweep with an incoming Explosive Ordnance Disposal (EOD) team in Kandahar, Afghanistan, Technical Sergeant **RONNIE BRICKEY** visually identified a victim-operated, pressure plate Improvised Explosive Device (IED), which saved the life of another EOD technician.

After rendering the IED safe, Sergeant Brickey's team immediately received fire from three separate locations. Sergeant Brickey quickly organized EOD and Army security personnel, directing them to a safer area where they could return fire. He provided cover fire so his team could maneuver, even as enemy gunfire impacted mere feet from his head. Sergeant Brickey's decisive actions allowed his team to engage with overwhelming firepower, causing the enemy to break contact and retreat.

The next day an Army infantry element was ambushed by a complex IED attack and sustained a casualty. Sergeant Brickey's EOD team responded and identified three more booby-trapped IEDs in the immediate area. Once again, his team came under attack from insurgent small-arms.

Sergeant Brickey exposed himself to small-arms fire and the live IED to make a safe evacuation path for his team. However, the soldiers were not able to evacuate far enough away from the explosive hazard due to accurate and effective small-arms fire. Sergeant Brickey then chose to render the IED safe, even while under fire. He attached the appropriate tool to the IED by hand and directed his EOD team member to perform the remaining remote procedure. He covered the friendly machine gun team with his body to protect them from the potential blast. His actions ultimately allowed the machine gun team to destroy the enemy, ending the 40-minute gunfight. His team then continued the mission, successfully disrupting and disposing of all remaining IEDs.

For his heroic actions, Sergeant Brickey was awarded a Bronze Star with Valor. This was his fifth Bronze Star, making him the fifth Airman in Air Force History to receive five or more Bronze Star Medals.

Special Agent (SA) **WILLIE S. COOPER**, Air Force Office of Special Investigation (AFOSI) Detachment 111, Edwards AFB, CA, was deployed to Combined Joint Task Force, Horn of Africa (CJTF-HOA), Camp Simba, Kenya, from May 8 – November 28, 2012.

On September 10, 2012, SA Cooper was finishing reports in his deployed office at Camp Simba, when he was notified of a plane crash just outside of the Kenyan Naval Base airstrip, an area known for its population of leopards, poisonous snakes and lions. Within ten minutes of notification of the incident, SA Cooper organized a response team, directed personnel to gather medical supplies, and rapidly departed to respond to the crash site.

Upon arrival in the area, SA Cooper and his team were forced to dismount their vehicles and continue on foot to the crash site because their vehicles were not capable of traversing the jungle. Disregarding the potential danger and risk to his personal safety, SA Cooper led his team into the dark jungle, running over 400 meters, while carrying as much medical equipment as he could load onto his back. Deeper in the jungle, SA Cooper and his team discovered a pilot who had been pulled to safety by two Military Policemen (MP) before an explosion occurred. The pilot told SA Cooper there were three other pilots still inside the aircraft.

SA Cooper directed the two MPs to lead him to the crash site, another 200 meters away, to search for survivors. They arrived to find the wreckage on fire with additional explosions occurring. SA Cooper quickly located and removed the remains of two of the pilots, before evacuating the aircraft due to the sparking fuselage, indicating an imminent explosion. SA Cooper returned to the first pilot and began first aid on his severe burns, deep lacerations over his body, and breathing complications. SA Cooper, with the assistance of another team member, carried the pilot and medical gear for more than 45 minutes, by the light of one flashlight, through the jungle.

It is only as a result of SA Cooper's unrelenting and valiant efforts, his ability to think quickly and rationally under such extreme circumstances, and his willingness to help a fellow human being, that the pilot is alive today.



SPECIAL AGENT  
WILLIE

**COOPER**

SPECIAL AGENT  
DETACHMENT 111, EDWARDS AIR FORCE BASE, CA





“Courage is doing what you’re afraid to do. There can be no courage unless you’re scared.”

**EDDIE RICKENBACKER**

When the “scramble” call was heard over the radio on August 4, 2012, Technical Sergeant **TRACY DEBBS**, a Pararescueman, rallied his team, sprinting to their helicopters at Bagram Air Base, Afghanistan. A coalition soldier from New Zealand had sustained injuries in a firefight and required immediate evacuation.

By the time the HH-60G Pavehawk helicopters arrived at the battlefield, five more of the coalition partners had been wounded. Sergeant Debbs led his team to the hastily prepared landing zone as pararescuemen treated the wounded while en route to the team’s field hospital. After successfully transferring all six patients to awaiting surgeons, Sergeant Debbs and the rescue team returned to the battlefield. When they arrived, they discovered more wounded allies as a result of direct enemy fire from a hillside.

As enemy fire erupted from the surrounding hills, Debbs instinctively attached himself to a rescue hoist to be lowered onto the steep, exposed hillside. He called in close-air support while his teammate provided life-saving treatment to a wounded soldier. Sergeant Debbs never lost focus as he moved the patients to safety while the combat paramedics, known as “Pedros”, blasted the hillsides to suppress enemy fire. He coordinated emergency extraction and safely loaded the patients on board the helicopter where he continued medical treatment for the wounded until their safe delivery for follow-on care.

Sergeant Debbs, and the team he led, exemplified “service before self” throughout the deadly firefight, as they courageously put the lives of others before their own.





MASTER SERGEANT  
**TRACY**

**DEBBS**

PARARESCUEMAN  
56TH RESCUE SQUADRON, RAF LAKENHEATH, ENGLAND





MASTER SERGEANT  
CHRISTOPHER

**DOGGETT**

MILITARY TRAINING LEADER  
17TH TRAINING WING, GOODFELLOW AFB, TX



On November 15 2012, Master Sergeant **CHRISTOPHER DOGGETT**, accompanied by his wife Brook, was one of 26 wounded-warrior veterans who were honorary guests and members of the procession in the 2012 Midland/Odessa, Texas, "Hunt for Heroes" Veterans Day Parade.

The wounded warriors and their spouses were divided into two groups of 25 and seated on two decorated, flatbed tractor-trailers, each driven by individual trucks. On one section of the parade route, the trucks, with trailers in tow, had to cross a set of railroad tracks.

As the second tractor-trailer was crossing the railroad tracks, the crossing lights began flashing and the guard-rail lowered, signifying an approaching train. Within a matter of seconds, a train traveling at an estimated 62 miles per hour careened toward the parade procession and, at 4:36 p.m., struck the tractor-trailer with wounded warriors and guests still on board.

Immediately following impact, Sergeant Doggett, who was on the first trailer, sprang into action and began triaging those who were injured on the second trailer. As he approached the destruction, Sergeant Doggett found one deceased male victim on the ground and assessed three additional victims who had only scrapes, so he continued along the chaotic scene.

The fourth and final victim Sergeant Doggett found was the wife of one of the veterans. She fell off the trailer upon initial impact, landed on the railroad track, and had her left leg completely severed from her body. Sergeant Doggett assessed that she was unconscious, not breathing, and bleeding profusely from a life threatening injury. Sergeant Doggett quickly turned to an onlooker and requested use of the onlooker's belt, which he used as an improvised tourniquet. He slowly cinched the tourniquet until the bleeding stopped and, with the assistance of an additional onlooker, began cardio-pulmonary resuscitation. After a matter of a few minutes, the victim was revived and eventually regained consciousness.

Thanks to the actions of Sergeant Doggett, the final person to receive his life-saving assistance was spared from being the fifth person to lose their life that fateful day. Sergeant Doggett was awarded his 5th Air Force Commendation Medal for his actions.

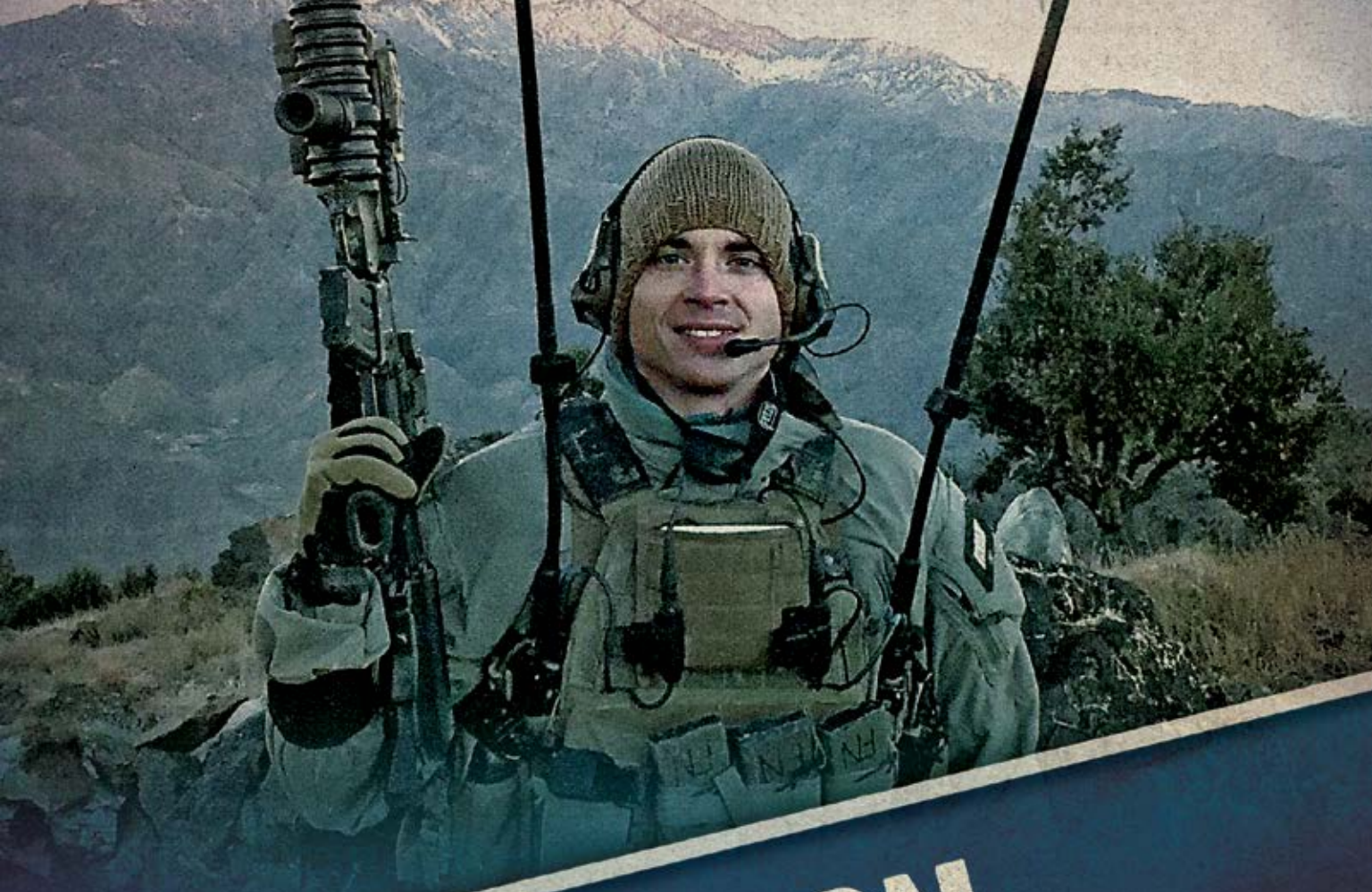
Deployed in support of Operation Enduring Freedom, Staff Sergeant **KYLE FULTON**, a combat controller, integrated airpower in support of coalition ground forces at Jalalabad Air Force Base, Afghanistan on December 2, 2012. Sergeant Fulton and his comrades were alerted to a nearby fire caused by a large explosion. En route, Fulton established communications with aircraft approaching the scene, identified friendly positions, and coordinated aircraft attacks on insurgents maneuvering north of the base's perimeter wall.

Sergeant Fulton and his team discovered that insurgent forces had explosively breached an entry control point and were engaged in a furious firefight with special operations forces defending the gap in the base's perimeter wall. Upon exiting the vehicle, Sergeant Fulton began taking point-blank fire from insurgents hiding in the bed of a truck. He returned fire with a teammate and killed two enemy fighters just before insurgents attempted to storm the breach, supported by heavy machine gun and rocket-propelled grenade fire. Intense fighting continued and enemy grenades exploded less than 10 meters from Sergeant Fulton's position, showering the area with lethal bursts of shrapnel.

As insurgent forces detonated a suicide vest just 15 meters from Sergeant Fulton, he and a teammate took cover behind a vehicle and engaged the enemy with 40mm grenades, preventing their position from being overrun. Moments later, an enemy grenade detonated close by, burying shrapnel in his leg. Sergeant Fulton deftly applied two tourniquets to stem his bleeding and, when two teammates shifted to cover his position, focused on directing attack aircraft onto remaining enemy positions.

Sergeant Fulton and his teammates prevented insurgent forces from storming Jalalabad Air Base and allowed isolated friendly elements to evacuate their wounded. For his heroic actions, Sergeant Fulton has been nominated for the Bronze Star with Valor.





STAFF SERGEANT  
KYLE

**FULTON**

COMBAT CONTROLLER  
23RD SPECIAL TACTICS SQUADRON, HURLBURT FIELD, FL





TECHNICAL SERGEANT  
**JARROD**

**MILLS**

EXPLOSIVE ORDNANCE DISPOSAL TECHNICIAN  
315TH CIVIL ENGINEER SQUADRON, CHARLESTON AFB, SC

On the night of September 21, 2012, Technical Sergeant **JARROD MILLS** deployed directly into a known insurgent stronghold in the Helmand Province of Afghanistan to clear a homemade explosive production site. His Explosive Ordnance Disposal (EOD) team searched an island in the middle of the Helmand River where they found and destroyed 50 kilograms of explosives and captured one insurgent who had been scouting their movements.

By late morning, the reconnaissance force and EOD team returned from across the river when they took enemy machine-gun fire from two positions on the far bank. The "recon" force team dashed across the river to assault one of the firing points as two British soldiers sustained injuries by a grenade. Under direct enemy fire, Sergeant Mills led his team across the open river bed to provide the recon force with additional firepower and enable the injured soldiers to receive emergency medical attention. The EOD team provided rear cover fire for the evacuation as medics treated the wounded and moved them on stretchers to a helicopter landing site.

Sergeant Mills' team suppressed the enemy over a 400-meter stretch of open space inundated with insurgent small-arms fire, engaging the enemy in a direct assault on one of their firing points. Despite exposure to incoming fire, the EOD team remained in position, even when Sergeant Mills took a 7.62 millimeter round to his body armor plate. The courageous efforts of Sergeant Mills and his comrades resulted in the killing of four insurgents and critical wounding of seven more.

Sergeant Mills and his team helped evacuate the two wounded British soldiers in a hostile environment and ensured no further ally casualties. For his extraordinary bravery and initiative, Sergeant Mills earned the Air Force Combat Action Medal and Bronze Star.



On September 5, 2012, Staff Sergeant **NICOLE NELLIST** faced her most challenging mission to date as a member of the Explosive Ordnance Disposal (EOD) Team deployed to Helmand Province, Afghanistan. They were tasked to support the United States Marine Corps' 1st Combat Engineer Battalion in support of route clearance missions, mitigating the threat from Improvised Explosive Devices (IED), and keeping supply routes open.

En route, several vehicles in Sergeant Nellist's convoy were significantly damaged by enemy IEDs. While clearing four damaged vehicles and tending to injured personnel, the team's position came under direct enemy attack from rocket-propelled grenades, mortars and small-arms fire. During the attack, Sergeant Nellist willingly risked her life to aid in the extraction of two critically wounded Marines from their vehicles. As they proceeded with the medical evacuation, the team faced more small-arms fire from several well placed fighting positions, including a nearby compound. Sergeant Nellist recognized the threat and used the advanced optics in her vehicle to gain positive identification of enemy positions and transmit them to her vehicle's gunner.

With her supported Marine unit pinned down and her vehicle's machine gun sector of fire restricted, Sergeant Nellist made the tough decision for her team to exit the safety of their heavily armored vehicle. Once dismounted, she engaged the enemy with suppressive fire from her M-4 so her team could set up a M-240B machine gun in an effective firing position, allowing them to target the enemy insurgents and provide cover for the rest of the convoy. During the hour-long battle, Sergeant Nellist twice braved open terrain while being targeted with enemy fire so that the machine gun's low ammunition could be resupplied. Once the enemy was neutralized, she continued to assist in the evacuation of casualties, ensuring their safe return to base.

As a result of her courage, heroism and selfless action under fire, Sergeant Nellist was awarded an Army Commendation Medal with Valor and a Marine Combat Action Ribbon.

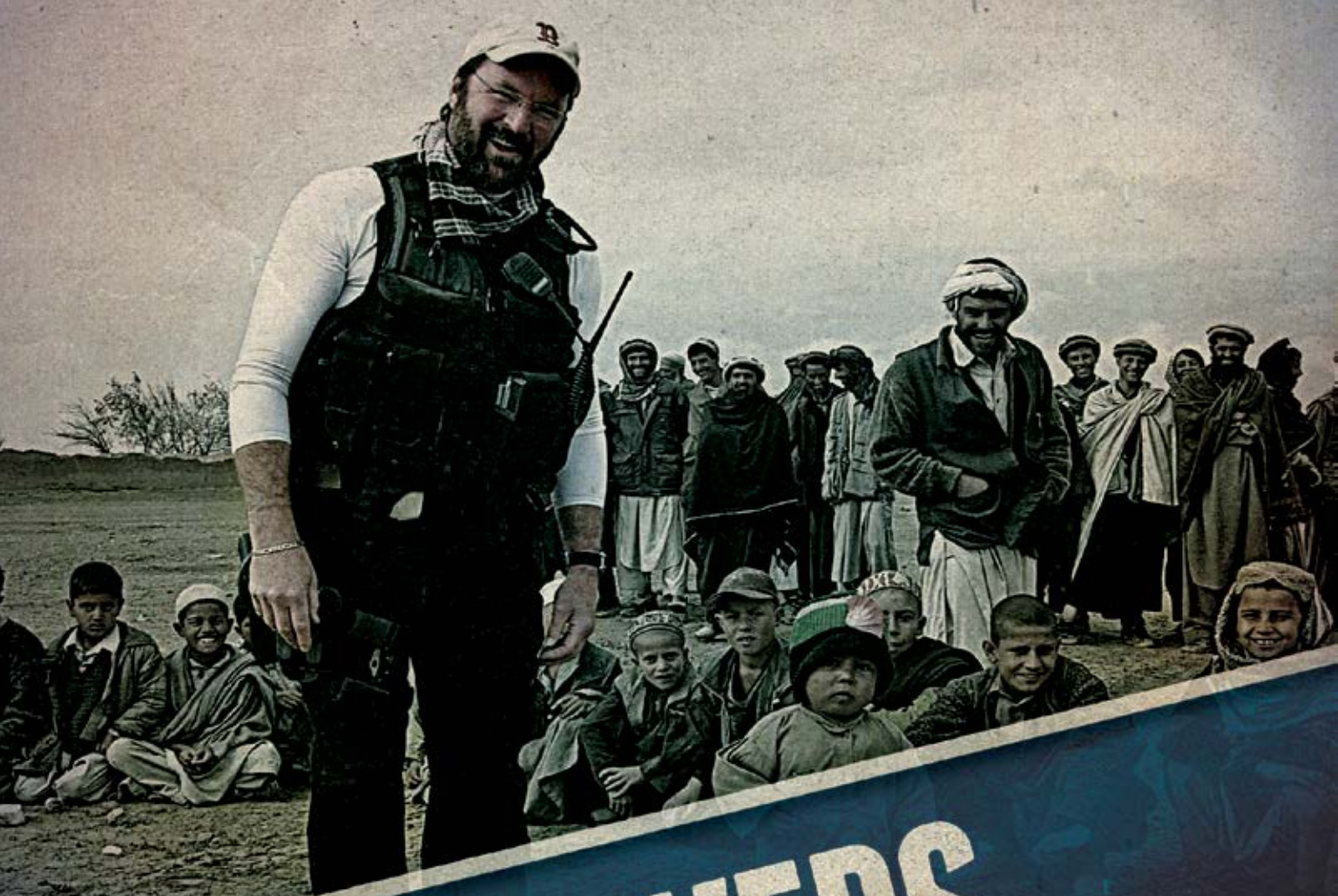


STAFF SERGEANT  
NICOLE

NELLIST

EXPLOSIVE ORDNANCE DISPOSAL TECHNICIAN  
802ND CIVIL ENGINEER SQUADRON, LACKLAND AFB, TX





SPECIAL AGENT  
ROBERT

# POWERS

SPECIAL AGENT  
HQ AIR FORCE OFFICE OF SPECIAL INVESTIGATIONS  
QUANTICO, VIRGINIA



Special Agent **ROBERT “BOB” POWERS** is the Director of Warfighter Readiness and Execution, Headquarters Air Force Office of Special Investigations, Quantico, Virginia. Late in the afternoon of February 12, 2013, SA Powers and his then fiancée, now wife, were shopping at a local grocery store in Norfolk, Virginia. SA Powers heard someone say there was a fire in the men’s restroom and customers began fleeing the building, concerned about their own safety. SA Powers, however, entered the restroom to see if anyone remained inside and found an elderly man engulfed in flames from waist down.

The man was disoriented and unable to help himself. SA Powers held the door open and yelled to the man to walk toward the sound of his voice, but the man replied that he could not move. At this point, the smoke was rapidly increasing and billowing from the room. SA Powers immediately located a fire extinguisher outside the bathroom and, at great risk and with no regard for his own safety, SA Powers again entered the room, aimed the extinguisher at where he believed the man’s legs were located and emptied its contents. The smoke became so thick he could no longer see the man. SA Powers pulled his shirt over his mouth and nose and rushed into the bathroom. The smoke burned his eyes and made it difficult to breathe, but he quickly found the man and was able to successfully extract him from the bathroom and move him to the main area of the grocery store. The man was severely injured, his pants were around his ankles, and his legs were severely burned. His shoes and pants were smoldering when he came out of the bathroom, so SA Powers helped him remove them. SA Powers saw that the man had a walker with him and it became evident the man had not been physically capable of leaving the bathroom on his own. The combination of pain from the heat of the flames, the restriction of the pants wrapped around his legs, and not being able to reach his walker, had left the man powerless. SA Powers stayed with the man until rescue services arrived.

For his heroic efforts that day, SA Powers was recognized with the Air Force Command Civilian Award for Valor Medal. In reporting SA Power’s actions, the Chief Fire Marshal of Norfolk, Virginia, credited SA Power’s quick response, calm actions and compassion for his fellow man with saving the victim’s life. When asked why he risked his safety, and perhaps even his life, SA Powers responded: “You just do it without thinking because it’s the right thing to do.”



“There’s a reason I don’t worry about the future of the Air Force. It has nothing to do with technology. It has nothing to do with talent. It has to do with heart. I’ll never worry, not while these guys are on our side. This is your Air Force.”

**GENERAL MARK A. WELSH III**





MASTER SERGEANT  
DELOREAN

**SHERIDAN**

COMBAT CONTROLLER  
21ST SPECIAL TACTICS SQUADRON, POPE FIELD, NC

In March 2013, Technical Sergeant **DELOREAN SHERIDAN** was completing a routine pre-brief for a combat control mission at his deployed location in Wardak Province, Afghanistan. While his team loaded gear into their vehicles, an Afghan National Police Officer suddenly turned and opened fire with a truck-mounted machine gun merely 25 feet away. Simultaneously, 15 to 20 insurgents just outside the village engaged the base with heavy machine gunfire.

With rounds striking and killing his teammates surrounding him, Sergeant Sheridan closed in on the gunman with a pistol and M-4 Rifle, neutralizing the immediate threat with deadly accuracy. Still under heavy attack from outside insurgents, Sergeant Sheridan exposed himself to heavy machine gunfire three more times to drag his wounded teammates out of the line of fire to a protected casualty collection point.

Once his wounded teammates were pulled to safety, Sergeant Sheridan directed close air support and surveillance aircraft to pinpoint, engage and eliminate the additional insurgents. During these efforts, Sergeant Sheridan also aided in assessing and moving his wounded teammates, while directing the entrance and exit of six medical evacuation helicopters.

Sergeant Sheridan's calmness and leadership in the face of danger helped saved 23 lives and allowed for the evacuation of his critically wounded teammates. For these actions, Sergeant Sheridan was awarded the Silver Star.

Major **SHAINÉ THROWER** is a Nuclear and Missile Operator. He was off-duty on his way to pick up his daughter from a field-trip when he first noticed the bus fire.

As he was pulling up his vehicle behind the tour bus, he saw flames emanating from the left-rear wheel well. Although his professional expertise is tailored to teaching graduate-level nuclear physics and advanced Intercontinental Ballistic Missile operations, he was in no way deterred from taking the actions he knew were needed at that moment. He promptly jumped out of his car and ran to the door of the bus where he directed the driver, who was unaware of the fire, to evacuate all passengers immediately. He then ran back to the source of the fire and teamed up with another parent to fight the fire while the bus was being evacuated.

As Major Thrower was fighting the flames the wheel well erupted with an explosion which flung his body away from the bus and propelled shrapnel through Major Thrower's body, causing a tibial fracture in his left leg. Within moments, the entire rear of the bus was engulfed in flames, but not before the 48 high school students and six faculty members reached safety, including his daughter Haylee. Little did he know, but his daughter had been sitting at the back of the bus. He helped save 54 lives that night and personified what "Service Before Self" really means.

Today Major Thrower is back on the job, helping to transform and inspire our nation's combat power at the USAF Weapons School, not only with his knowledge, but also with his character.





MAJOR  
SHAINÉ

**THROWER**

NUCLEAR AND MISSILE OPERATOR  
315TH WEAPONS SQUADRON, NELLIS AFB, NV





SENIOR AIRMAN  
**ANDREW**

**WILLIAMSON**

PARARESCUEMAN  
48TH RESCUE SQUADRON DAVIS-MONTHAN AFB, AZ

On February 22, 2012, Senior Airman **ANDREW WILLIAMSON**, a Pararescueman stationed at Camp Bastion, Afghanistan, responded to an urgent medical evacuation request. Two soldiers were trapped inside a burning Georgian armored vehicle that struck an Improvised Explosive Device (IED).

Airman Williamson and three team members loaded a British helicopter with 200 pounds of extraction gear and landed a quarter mile from the fiery scene. Forced to carry the equipment through an enemy-held village, Airman Williamson and his team arrived unharmed, extinguished the flames and removed the fallen soldiers while heavy munitions exploded all around.

As he exited the rear hatch of the smoke-filled vehicle, another IED detonated nearby. Without hesitation, Airman Williamson ran through an IED-laden field toward a cry for help and found a severely wounded U.S. Marine with third degree burns to the neck and shoulders, and severe hemorrhaging from facial trauma. The Marine was unable to breathe so Airman Williamson performed a field cricothyrotomy, surgically cutting into the Marine's throat and inserting a breathing tube, allowing the Marine to take in air. Because of low visibility conditions, Airman Williamson used night vision goggles to see so he could administer an IV of pain relieving narcotics and lifesaving antibiotics.

Airman Williamson established a safe helicopter landing zone for the evacuation of the injured Marine. He continued on scene for another hour, extricating other Georgian soldiers and deceased coalition soldiers. For his heroic actions, Airman Williamson was awarded the Air Force Combat Action Medal, named the Special Operations Medical Associations Medic of the Year, and received the award of Air Combat Command Pararescueman of the Year. He was also nominated for the Bronze Star with Valor.



"The American story has never been about things coming easy. It has been about rising to the moment when the moment is hard. About rejecting panicked division for purposeful unity. About seeing a mountaintop from the deepest valley."

**PRESIDENT BARACK OBAMA**

# **PORTRAITS IN COURAGE**

is designed and produced by  
Air Force Multimedia Services Division (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

# PORTRAITS IN COURAGE

VOL 8



**Portraits in Courage Website**

<http://static.dma.mil/usaf/courage/>

**Facebook**

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

