

VOLUME 1 SPRING 2007

PORTRAITS
IN COURAGE
AIRMEN IN THE FIGHT



PORTRAITS IN COURAGE

GENERAL T. MICHAEL MOSELEY, THE 18TH AIR FORCE
CHIEF OF STAFF, DEVELOPED THE "PORTRAITS IN COURAGE"
SERIES TO HIGHLIGHT THE HONOR, VALOR, DEVOTION
AND SELFLESS SACRIFICE OF AMERICA'S AIRMEN

THE CHIEF OF STAFF'S PORTRAITS IN COURAGE

Inside the pages of this book you will find stories of Airmen who have shown tremendous courage in time of war: the physical courage to leap into harm's way to protect comrades; the morale courage to continue to serve our country despite enormous obstacles; and the emotional courage to focus on the mission despite harrowing circumstances. These vignettes represent all that is good about our Total Force Airmen – integrity, courage, bravery, selflessness, compassion and commitment.

Ours is a generation that proudly stands on the shoulders of heroes. Airmen of the past proved their mettle in the skies and on the ground in places like Saint Mihiel, Ploesti, Schweinfurt, Rabaul, MiG Alley, Hanoi, Baghdad, Mogadishu and Roberts Ridge. Their courage serves to remind us all of our great heritage and boundless horizon.

Today our Airmen's courage is on display defending our homeland and our nation's interests around the world. As you read these profiles, remember the bonds we all share as Airmen. We are expeditionary. We take the fight to our enemies. We are resourceful and innovative, pushing the boundaries of air, space, and cyberspace. We realize that while technology *distinguishes* our service today, technology does not *define* our service. Courage defines our service. It always has and always will.

This inaugural volume of The Chief of Staff's *Portraits in Courage* series serves to remind us all of the courage and sacrifice of America's Airmen.



T. MICHAEL MOSELEY
General, USAF
18th Chief of Staff

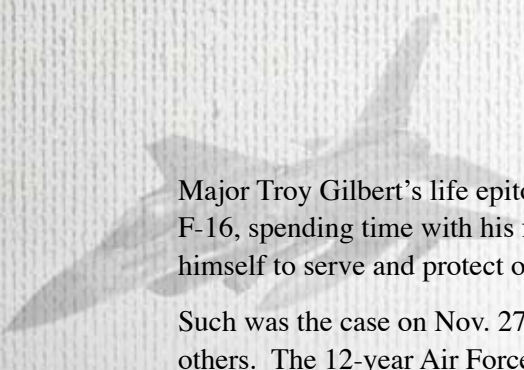
F L Y , F I G H T A N D W I N !

MAJOR TROY GILBERT



PORTRAITS
IN COURAGE





Major Troy Gilbert's life epitomized the core value of Service before Self. Whether flying the F-16, spending time with his family, or helping with a church function, he gave unselfishly of himself to serve and protect others.

Such was the case on Nov. 27, 2006--the day that Major Gilbert was killed in action protecting others. The 12-year Air Force veteran was assigned to the 332nd Air Expeditionary Wing at Balad Air Base, Iraq. In earlier missions, he completed 21 combat sorties in the F-16 supporting troops who were under enemy fire. On one mission, he found and identified anti-Iraqi Forces, passed the critical targeting information to coalition forces, who then attacked and eliminated the threat to ground forces. Another mission sent Major Gilbert into a time-sensitive operation, which ended with the pinpoint delivery of a laser-guided weapon that destroyed 10 insurgents and their truck in a concealed palm grove.

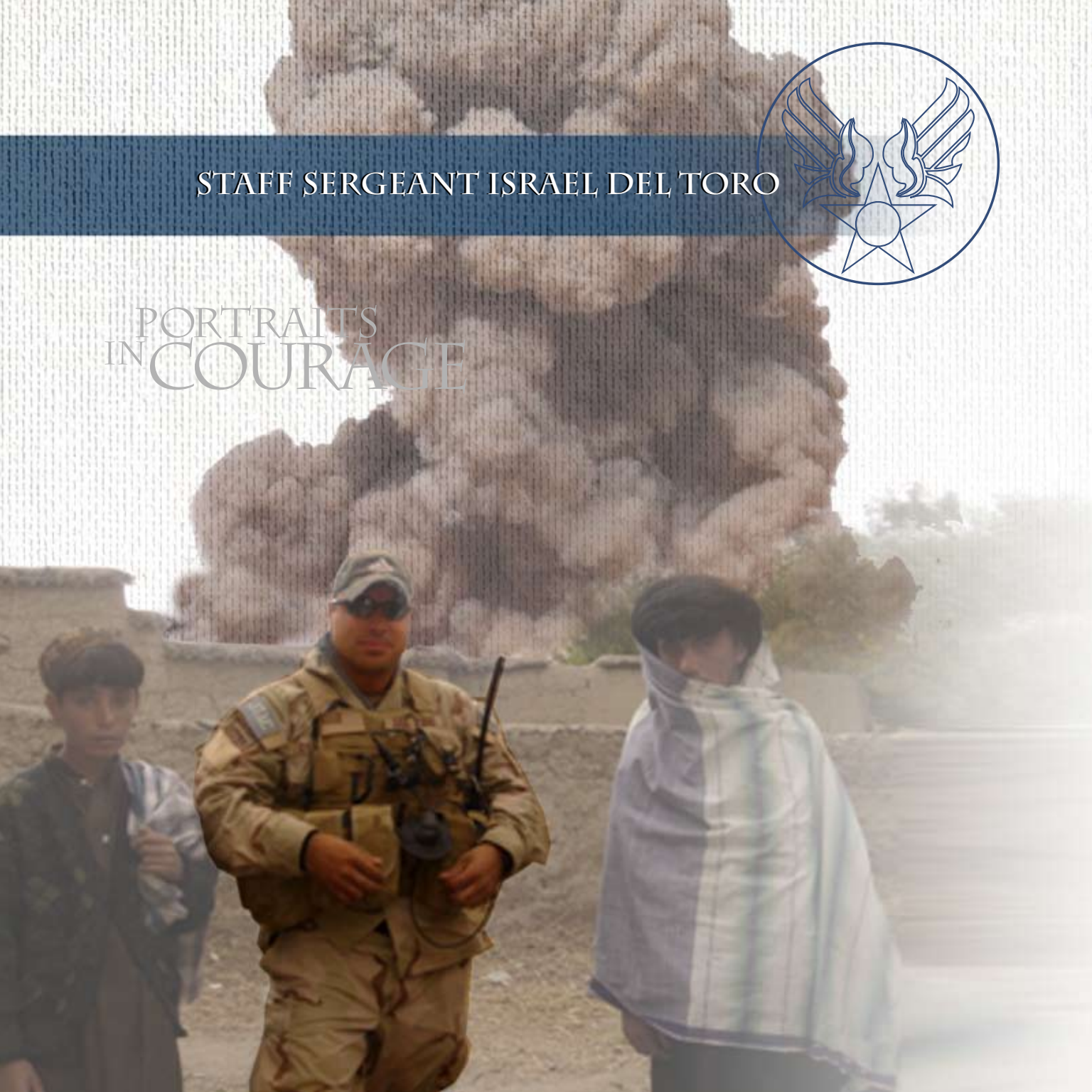
On the day he died, Major Gilbert heroically led a flight of two F-16s in an aerial combat mission near Taji, Iraq. On the ground, insurgents were unleashing truck-mounted heavy machine guns, rocket-propelled grenades, small arms fire and mortars to attack coalition troops. In addition, a nearby crippled Army attack helicopter crew was dangerously close to being overrun by the enemy forces. Engaging the enemy meant certain anti-aircraft fire for Major Gilbert, but despite the danger, he went after the insurgents. The major launched a strafing attack against the truck, destroying it with a burst of 20-millimeter cannon fire. The driver of another truck fled. Despite enemy fire, Major Gilbert continued to press the insurgents with a second strafing pass at extreme low-level to help save the lives of the helicopter crew and other ground forces. He lost his life on that strafing pass when his aircraft hit the ground.

Major Gilbert's final act of moral and physical courage was conducted selflessly, just as he had always lived his life.

STAFF SERGEANT ISRAEL DEL TORO



PORTRAITS
IN COURAGE



“I’m just a regular guy who loves his job, I just happened to get hurt.” That is how Staff Sgt. Israel “D.T.” Del Toro Jr., describes himself. But to those who know him, his drive and determination despite being burned over 80 percent of his body make him a hero.

D.T. is a Tactical Air Control Party (TACP) operator currently recovering from his severe injuries. TACP operators control the air power in support of the ground forces commander.

On the fateful day in 2005 that he was injured, he was the joint terminal attack controller (JTAC) on a mission with Soldiers of the 2nd Battalion of the 503 Infantry Brigade in Southern Afghanistan, a job he was well qualified for. Sergeant Del Toro is a jumpmaster and master parachutist with more than 110 jumps. He also completed Army Air Assault Training.

On Dec. 4, 2005, the lead vehicle Sergeant Del Toro was riding in was hit by an improvised explosive device while crossing a creek. Engulfed in flames, the nine-year Air Force veteran hit the ground and tried to put out the fire.

“I remember thinking I was never going to see my family again,” Sergeant Del Toro said. But a lieutenant from his team dragged him into the creek, telling him, “Don’t worry D.T., you’re not going to die here.” The lieutenant was right; Sergeant Del Toro survived, though nearly 80 percent of his body was burned.

Since that day, Sergeant Del Toro has fought for every inch of recovery his body has made. He has toughed it out through many hard days filled with surgeries, skin grafts and grueling physical therapy. Consistent with his humble attitude, he credits the love and closeness of his family and support of the Air Force for the progress he’s made thus far. His heart remains that of an Air Force warrior, and his desire would be to remain a part of the TACP career field. If his recovery does not allow him to return to the job he loves, he’d like to use his experience to help others as a liaison for military burn victims.

When confronted by those who wonder how he maintains a positive outlook despite his circumstances, he quotes baseball great Lou Gehrig by saying, “You might think I got a bad break, but I’m honored to have worked with some of the greatest guys out there.”

SENIOR MASTER SERGEANT DALE P. BERRYHILL



PORTRAITS
IN COURAGE



While supporting Operation IRAQI FREEDOM, Senior Master Sgt. Dale P. Berryhill, an airborne mission systems specialist, risked his life to save his fellow crewmembers on May 19, 2003.

After a re-supply mission near Erbil, Iraq, Sergeant Berryhill and crew were flying back to their forward operating base. At about 17,000 feet, a coolant gas-fed fire erupted with blowtorch intensity just forward of Sergeant Berryhill's duty position.

Smoke and flames quickly engulfed the cargo compartment and flight deck, filling the entire aircraft with toxic fumes. As other crewmembers began donning their personal protective gear – oxygen masks and smoke goggles – Sergeant Berryhill reacted instinctively and without hesitation. He knew the survival of the crew and aircraft depended on putting out the fire.

He acted quickly. With complete disregard for his life and without the protection of an oxygen mask and smoke goggles, he retrieved a fire extinguisher and headed toward the fire as the aircraft descended at a high rate of speed. Charging down a narrow maintenance corridor and disappearing into a wall of smoke and flames, he attacked the source of the lethal fire. Sergeant Berryhill single-handedly began fighting the inferno as other crewmembers still struggled to put on their personal protective gear in near zero visibility.

Sergeant Berryhill inhaled large amounts of toxic fumes as he battled and eventually extinguished the flames. With his eyes blurred by the smoke, he navigated his communications systems panel by feel to relay MAYDAY calls to multiple command and control platforms. He remained at his smoke-filled post during prolonged periods when there was no contact with the flight deck.

After obtaining clearance to land on a taxiway at Baghdad International Airport, he successfully cleared all incoming air traffic and arranged for fire and rescue while the defenseless aircraft came under two small-arms and rocket-propelled grenade attacks. Battling his own physical fatigue, he plotted with pin-point accuracy the coordinates of the enemy fire and notified coalition forces as to the exact location.

During the 13 minutes of extraordinary heroic action, from the beginning of the fire until touch down, Sergeant Berryhill completed his duties flawlessly despite suffering from severe smoke and toxic fume inhalation. After landing, though nearly physically incapacitated, he refused medical treatment and remained with the aircraft to continue updating command elements. Nearly three hours later, he was taken to the flight surgeon at his forward location for treatment of severe smoke inhalation.

TECHNICAL SERGEANT MICHELLE BAREFIELD



PORTRAITS
IN COURAGE



In January 2006 Tech. Sgt. Michelle Barefield once again packed her bags for a six- month combat tour in Iraq, less than a year after she returned home from the last deployment. The 18-year Air Force veteran and mother of two was no stranger to deployments; she had served multiple times in Southwest Asia and the former Yugoslavia as an Explosive Ordnance Disposal (EOD) technician. However, this deployment was far from routine. Before it ended, she would survive three separate attacks, take part in a gun battle with insurgents, and take control of a scene after the death of a comrade.

With just days in country at Baghdad International Airport, Sergeant Barefield witnessed first hand the violent death of a team member to an Improvised Explosive Device (IED). During a check ride with her outgoing team, a request to clear a road frequented by civilians came in from the U.S. Army Tactical Operations Center. With one IED safely destroyed, her counterpart began a sweep for additional threats when the unseen device took his life. Without hesitation Sergeant Barefield rendered aid to another injured team member and took control of the scene. With selfless dedication, she simultaneously organized the sweep for additional hazards, the post blast analysis of the device, and the recovery of her fallen brother's remains. This was just the beginning of the events that Sergeant Barefield would encounter on this deployment.

While enroute to another reported IED, her convoy itself was targeted. Several vehicles hit IEDs including the one in which Sergeant Barfield was riding. She jumped into action, making sure her teammates were uninjured, initiating area safety measures and helping recover wounded comrades from the burning remains of the other vehicles. This would be the first of three IED attacks her team would survive.

Explosive devices were a reality that she dealt with daily, but other threats lurked as well. On yet another day during what appeared to be a routine IED mission, insurgents barraged the team with small arms fire. Sergeant Barefield did not hesitate. She returned fire while taking cover, allowing her fellow EOD members to return to the safety of the armored vehicle. She, too, eventually made her way back to the vehicle and lived to battle many more days of the enemy's attacks and tactics. Sergeant Barefield is a well-respected leader in the EOD career field because of her courage under fire and selfless dedication to the team.

SENIOR MASTER SERGEANT GREGORY WILLIAMS



PORTRAITS
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Senior Master Sergeant Gregory Williams is the leader you want at the front of your squad – whether preparing a unit for the fight through grueling training, or taking charge in the midst of a war zone, Sergeant Williams’ bold leadership and unwavering focus saved lives during a six-month combat tour in 2005. Sergeant Williams was charged with leading 113 Airmen in defense of Iraq’s busiest airfield. His airfield and team would come under more than 85 rocket and mortar attacks during his tour, but none could shake the resolve of this Security Forces veteran.

During one summer attack, Sergeant Williams raced through a 10-round mortar barrage on the installation and compound to aid injured personnel. Their injuries were incapacitating. While mortar fire rained down around him, he administered first-aid to two victims until medical help arrived. Sergeant Williams then rushed back to the center of attack, where he located two impact points and found a wounded Soldier suffering serious internal injuries. Sergeant Williams kept the Soldier calm and immobilized to prevent further injury. Medical staff credited him with a life-saving effort. During the hour-long attack, he called in points of impact, checked for impact damage, accounted for personnel and administered first-aid. He ran to locations and took charge of situations, providing leadership in a crisis.

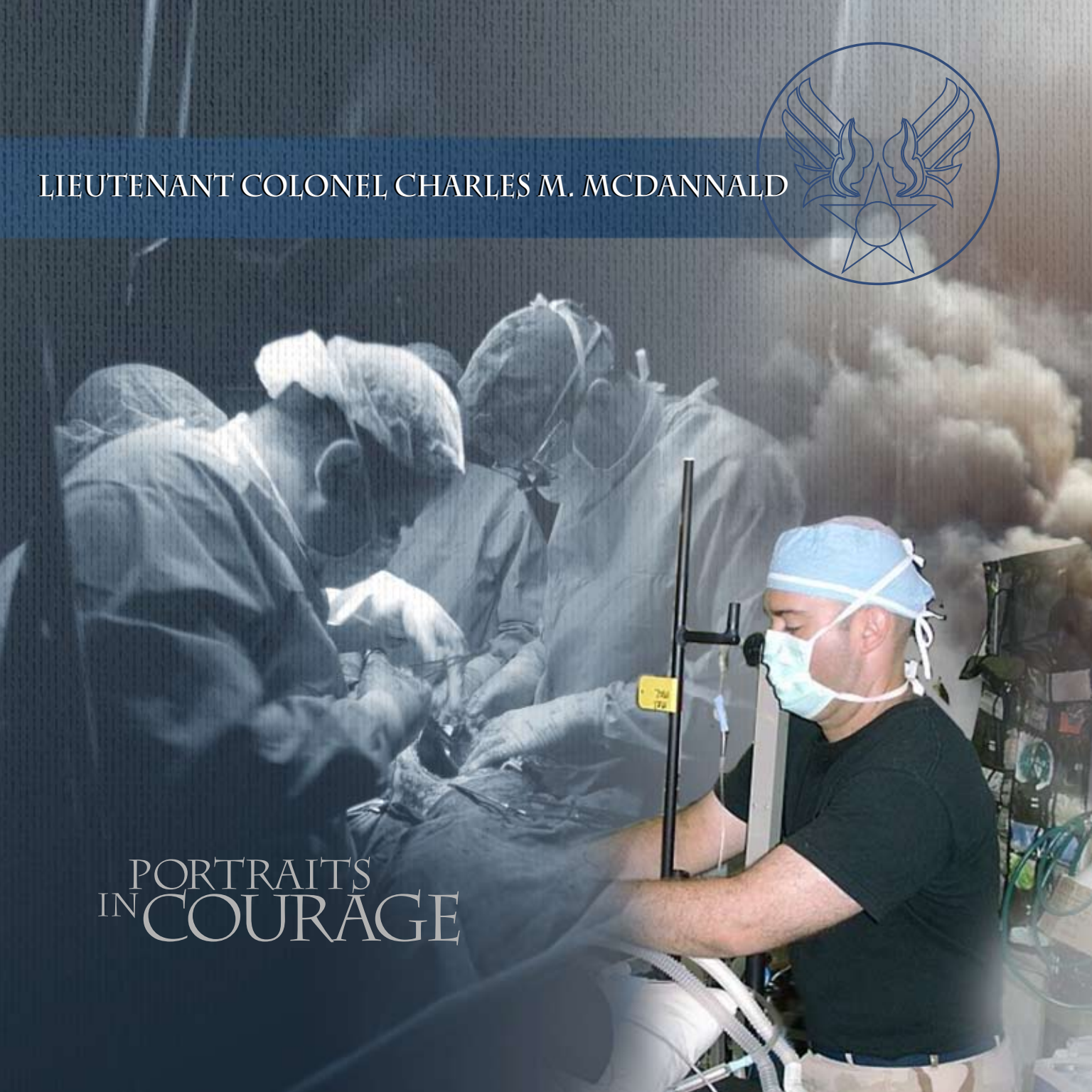
The attack did not thwart his continued drive to take the fight to the enemy. During his deployed tour, Sergeant Williams orchestrated more than 50 combat patrols into hostile territory, resulting in the arrest of 10 insurgents and seizure of hundreds of mortars and thousands of anti-aircraft rounds.

Sergeant Williams’ dedication to the mission has taken him back to Iraq; he is now deployed on a 365-day tour using his combat experience to train and conduct joint patrols with the Iraqi Police in downtown urban environments. His students can be sure they are learning from the one of the best.

LIEUTENANT COLONEL CHARLES M. MCDANNALD



PORTRAITS
IN COURAGE





Lt. Col. Charles McDannald's 20 years of experience as a registered nurse was put to the test while deployed as part of a Special Operations Surgical Team to Ramadi, Iraq, in the Al Anbar Province. The five-person surgical team deployed with special operators to the front lines, where the flow of patience was unending, their wounds life-threatening, and the surgical conditions less-than-perfect.

In the 100 days Colonel McDannald spent as the Certified Registered Nurse Anesthetist with the special operations team, he was part of 35 major life-saving surgeries, including four that required open heart massage to resuscitate the patient. He daily performed intense procedures to repair the damage done by roadside explosions, gunfire, suicide bombers and mortar attacks. Every day, the team resuscitated from one to 10 severely wounded people. Some of those were fellow Americans, others coalition partners, even insurgents or the innocent Iraqis who were sometimes caught in the crossfire. All received the skilled care of the dedicated team.

On Sept. 15, 2005, Colonel McDannald's unit was struck by a 120-millemeter rocket. The blast blew the sleeping quarter's door open and woke up the off-duty members of the surgical team. One U.S. Soldier was killed instantly by the rocket and three others were wounded. One of the three Soldiers had an entrance wound at the right clavicle and had diminished breath sounds. The surgical team sprung into action and determined that he was bleeding into the chest cavity. The wounded Soldier went into surgery immediately, and the general surgeon was forced to open the rib cage to get to the source of the bleeding.

Despite the chaos that accompanied the post-attack operations, Colonel McDannald worked furiously to administer blood, fluids and drugs to buy the surgeons enough time to stop the massive blood loss. The patient was losing blood nearly as fast as they could administer it, but the team was determined not to lose the patient.

Shrapnel had lacerated a major vein and the surgeons worked swiftly to repair it. Like so many of the patients that Colonel McDannald and the surgical team treated, the patient stabilized and was transported safely for further treatment to the medical center at Balad Air Base, Iraq.

Colonel McDannald is back home for now, using his experience to treat patients at Mountain Home AFB, Idaho, but the 100 days he spent in 2005 treating front-line warriors will forever be etched in his heart and mind.

SENIOR AIRMAN SHEA DODSON



PORTRAITS
IN COURAGE

It was another hot and sunny day at Phoenix Base in Baghdad and Senior Airman Shea Dodson wanted to do more than his assigned administrative duties inside Baghdad's "Green Zone." The call was out for volunteers to provide security for ongoing convoys, so Airman Dodson raised his hand. After some intense just-in-time training, he was performing security detail for his first convoy.

On his first mission, Airman Dodson put his training to good use. When a suspected vehicle-born suicide bomber raced toward the convoy, he fired .50 caliber rounds into the engine block no fewer than four-times, disabling the vehicle just as he was trained to do.

During the same mission, his unit became mired in traffic near a high-rise development. His eagle eyes noticed movement from above. An Iraqi male armed with an AK-47 was creeping toward the edge of a balcony overlooking the convoy. Airman Dodson immediately engaged with indirect warning fire from his M-16, hitting the wall next to the suspected insurgent's head. The armed Iraqi dove for cover and never reappeared.

When the convoy arrived at its final destination, a children's school, he continued to do as trained and performed a complete security sweep of the perimeter houses (interior and exterior) to ensure they were clear. Airman Dodson remained on armed watch as his team handed out school supplies to the kids in the open courtyard adjacent to the school.

By 2 p.m. that same day, Airman Dodson was back at his desk, keeping track of critical data for the commanding general of the Multinational Security Command – Iraq (MNSTC-I) – it was all in a day's work for this dedicated Airman.

MAJOR DAVID E. RAYMAN



PORTRAITS
IN COURAGE





On July 27, 2006, then-Captain David Rayman led a two-ship formation of A-10s in support of a troops-in-contact situation in Central Afghanistan. The Joint Terminal Air Controller (JTAC) reported a friendly convoy was receiving heavy small arms, rocket- propelled grenade and machine gun fire, and he requested immediate close air support.

Heavy haze and dust made it impossible for Captain Rayman to make visual contact with the target area at altitudes above 5,000 feet and distances beyond two miles. He knew he had to get low to be effective. Fully aware of the risks involved, he descended and made a hazardous low-altitude pass to identify the target and force the enemy to break contact. While he was able to locate the target, the enemy was undaunted and continued to press its attack. Captain Rayman would have to employ his weapons to protect the “friendlies” on the ground.

The poor visibility made the safe deployment of his ordnance extremely complex. To add to his difficulties, his wingman’s radio failed and the JTAC was not co-located with the convoy under attack. Despite these challenges, the nine-year Air Force veteran repeatedly employed weapons within 100 meters of the friendly convoy along a three-and-a half kilometer “kill zone.” Under the cover of his highly accurate 30-millimeter strafing fire, the convoy was able to disengage as Captain Rayman directed his flight’s bomb, rocket and gun passes which destroyed the enemy’s strongholds. In all, the captain accurately employed more than 600, 30-millimeter rounds, eight rockets, and one MK-82 bomb under very difficult environmental conditions.

When it was over, Captain Rayman had saved the lives of the coalition convoy members, took the lives of the insurgents, and destroyed the enemy firing positions.

MASTER SERGEANT MARK HURST



PORTRAITS
IN COURAGE



Mark Hurst doesn't take no for an answer. The master sergeant is a Tactical Air Control Party (TACP) who was facing medical discharge from the Air Force after losing his left eye during combat operations in Afghanistan in 2004. As a TACP, he had more than 100 parachute jumps to his credit, unparalleled training, and a respectable amount of combat experience under his belt. But the real reason that Master Sgt. Hurst remains in the Air Force today is because of his desire and his heart -- not being able to wear the uniform of his country was simply unacceptable to the 12-year Air Force veteran.

His injury came during his fifth combat tour in Iraq and Afghanistan. He was serving as a Joint Tactical Air Controller (JTAC) in Afghanistan, controlling airpower in support of ground forces. On the day he was injured, a rocket-propelled grenade hit his vehicle, leaving him with severe shrapnel wounds to the left side of his face, body and eye. He was treated at the field hospital in Afghanistan and quickly airlifted to Landstuhl Regional Medical Center, Germany, and eventually to Walter Reed Army Medical Center in Washington D.C.

Once recovered and fitted with a prosthetic eye, Sergeant Hurst would not accept anything but being able to contribute to the Air Force and his country. He went to work as the Operations Training Manager and Parachutist Program Manager at Pope AFB, N.C., all the while working hard to stay qualified and request waivers so he could again serve in the combat zone. His waiver was approved and he is now again able to static-line parachute. He deployed to Iraq to once again serve in a combat zone from March to July 2006.

Sergeant Hurst's experiences have made him a strong advocate for wounded Airmen. He is often a guest briefer to senior leaders in a variety of courses where he shares from his perspective the best ways to help wounded Airmen and their families through the difficult recovery period.

Sergeant Hurst serves today because of his devotion to duty, his commitment to the Air Force, and his determination to remain a TACP who proudly contributes to his country in uniform.

TECHNICAL SERGEANT COREY P. CLEWLEY



PORTRAITS
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Tech. Sgt. Corey Clewley found out what it means to be tested under fire while on a special mission in Southwest Asia in 2005. As a loadmaster for the Air Force, Sergeant Clewley was loading cargo on his own aircraft when he saw a Romanian C-130 come in and take a hard landing. Unbeknownst to the Romanian crew, the overuse of the aircraft brakes caused a fire on board. Sergeant Clewley sprung into action.

He told a fellow loadmaster to relay to their own pilots to radio the control tower, while he and a crew chief grabbed fire extinguishers and headed toward the aircraft. The fire intensified as it spread to the aircraft's fuselage and ruptured the hydraulic brake line. Despite the danger to himself, Sergeant Clewley got within eight feet of the flames and attempted to suppress the fire.

His sense of urgency tripled when he realized that the C-130 crew was still inside the aircraft and unable to get out of the burning airplane.

"I saw one of the crew mouthing 'please, please,' and pointing to the troops' [exit] door," said the 15-year Air Force veteran. Sergeant Clewley refocused his attention to that area and began suppressing the fire, allowing the crew to safely exit the aircraft. He continued to keep the fire under control until the fire department arrived.

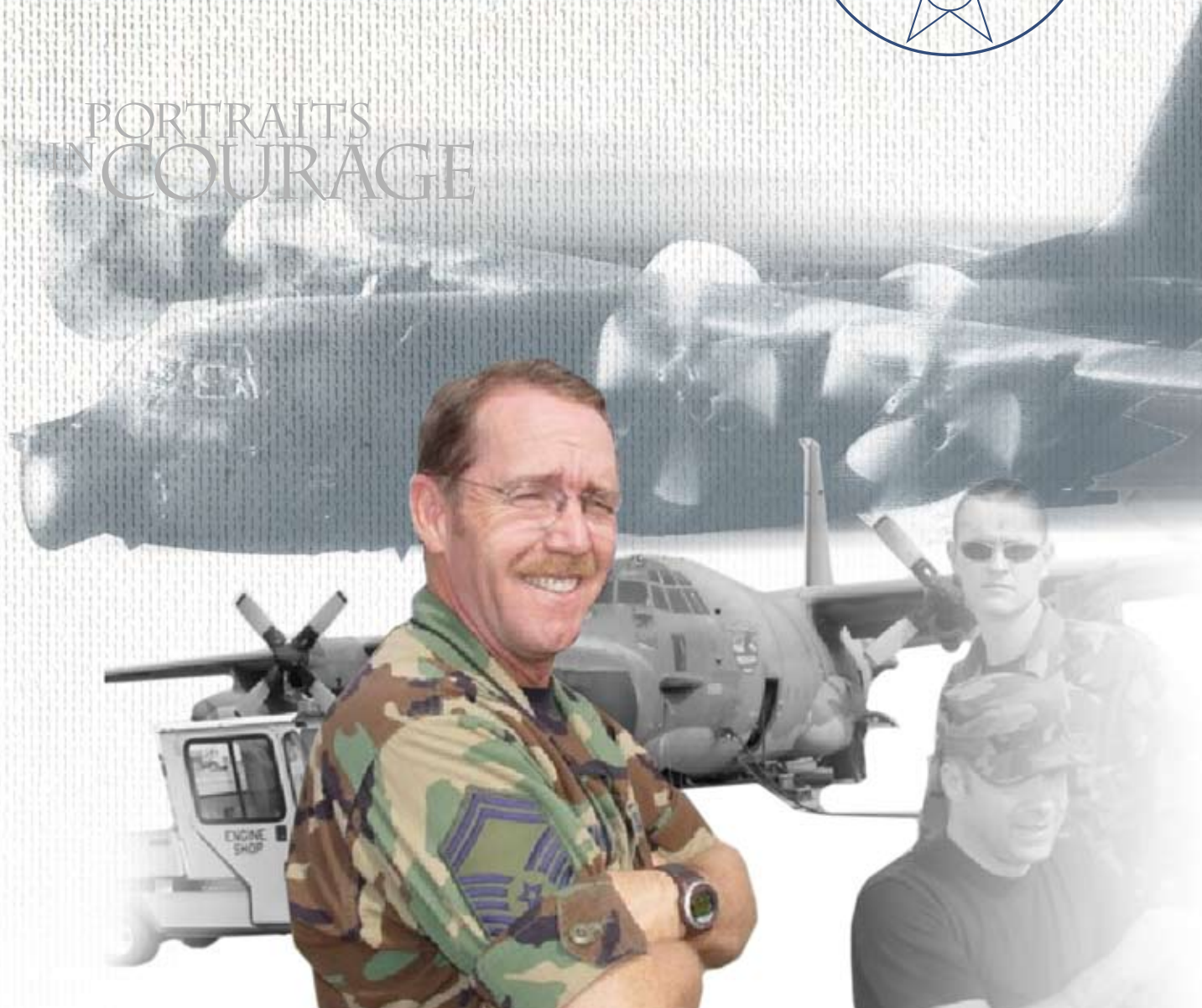
Sergeant Clewley credits the team effort that kept the incident from becoming a deadly event – from the pilot who relayed the message to the control tower, to the crew chief who went with him and the fire department that responded. Sergeant Clewley never considered the risk to his own life as he worked to save a crew and aircraft that was not part of his responsibility, his service or even his nation.

"To me, in a situation like that, saving the lives of the people on board is more important than who owns the aircraft."

CHIEF MASTER SERGEANT PHILLIP BAHM



PORTRAITS
IN
COURAGE





During the height of Operation ANACONDA in Afghanistan, Chief Master Sgt. Phillip Bahm led an aircraft recovery team on a dangerous daylight mission to recover an MC-130E aircraft from a runway close to the battlefield.

The aircraft was mired in mud at an abandoned dirt runway during a high-priority medical evacuation mission the night before. Initial reports indicated the aircraft was beyond recovery and probably destroyed by the enemy.

Chief Bahm was undaunted. Working closely with his team, he devised a plan for extraction, securing all of the equipment they would need to recover the valuable aircraft.

Two British MH-47 helicopters took the team to the abandoned airstrip. Chief Bahm and his team were given just three hours to free the aircraft before they were to be picked up at sundown. As the recovery operation began, the first of several enemy mortar attacks landed close by on the perimeter of the airfield, and drew steadily closer as the team continued their work.

With darkness quickly approaching, Chief Bahm kept his team focused on the task, eventually getting the earth around the aircraft's wheels dug away and shored up. He directed the team to gradually use the dirt to create ramps leading out of the mud, so the aircraft could use its own power to free itself. Chief Bahm's plan proved to be successful as the aircraft was able to use close to maximum engine thrust to climb out of the mire and back onto solid ground.

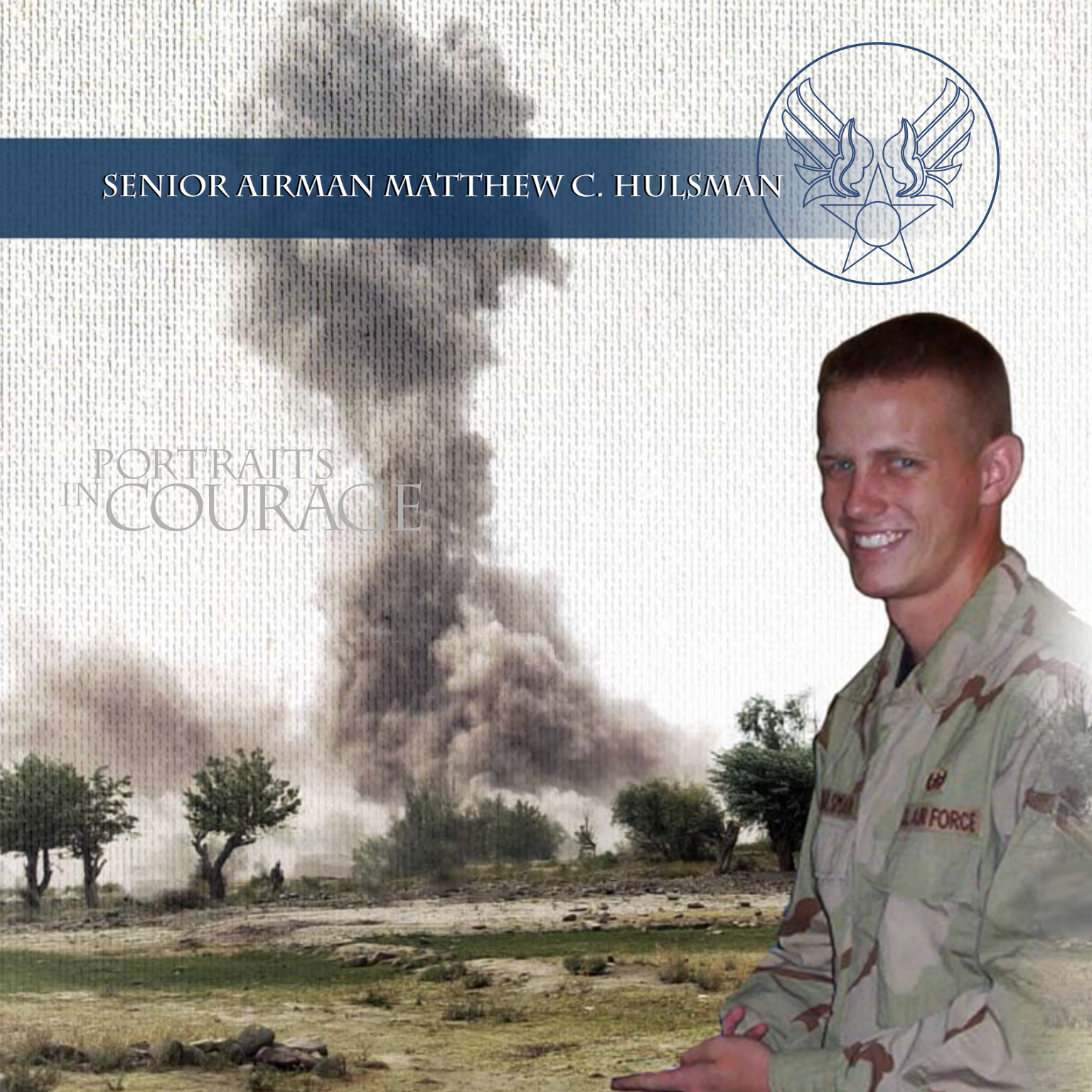
As the MC-130E was taxiing away from the mud trench, another mortar round detonated less than two kilometers from the airfield. The threat was further intensified as large groups of potentially hostile locals gathered at the edge of the airfield, attracted by the sounds of the aircraft's engines. Eventually, after three hours of determined work by the chief and his recovery team, the MC-130E was able to take off and return back to Bagram airfield where it dropped off the recovery team and refueled in order to return to home station.

Despite the obvious threats to his own life and the lives of his team, Chief Bahm remained poised and determined to perform the recovery of this important national asset, a task that just hours before was deemed impossible.

SENIOR AIRMAN MATTHEW C. HULSMAN



PORTRAITS
IN
COURAGE



Don't let his youth and boyish demeanor fool you. Senior Airman Matthew Hulsman, a 21-year old from Elmendorf AFB, Alaska, has seen his share of life in the combat zone. During a six-month deployment to Afghanistan, Hulsman responded to 87 Explosive Ordnance Disposal combat operations, neutralized more than 48,000 unexploded ordnance, five Improvised Explosive Devices (IEDs), and two enemy weapons caches, denying insurgents the chance to use more than 25,000 pounds of explosives on coalition forces.

Enough for one deployment? There's more. Airman Hulsman worked with U.S. Army Special Operations Forces and infantry units on 12 distinct combat missions which led to the elimination of 200 Taliban fighters, the destruction of an emplaced improvised rocket, disposal of over 300 pounds of hazardous munitions, recovery of eight vehicles, and the rescue of 40 people trapped inside an area full of mines. During these missions he successfully fought off eight Taliban engagements.

As a convoy driver, he deftly maneuvered his vehicle during multiple day and night fire-fights, including one battle that required him to drive into the kill zone to aid two comrades. His heroism contributed to the safe evacuation of his team members and the elimination of two enemy fighters.

His work doesn't stop when the action does, he also worked diligently after the fight, conducting post blast investigations on three separate vehicles which were struck by IEDs within his convoy in a 24-hour period. His thorough analysis identified a new, enemy targeting, tactic and practice (TTP) allowing coalition forces to adjust their own TTPs to deter and prevent further attacks.

Given his combat-proven first two years as an Airman and his unquestionable courage in the midst of personal danger, Airman Hulsman is sure to be an asset to the Air Force and our Nation for the future.

BRIAN KOLFAGE



PORTRAITS
IN COURAGE

Brian Kolfage endured a life-changing event that would have sent some of lesser spirit into a downward spiral. But for this former security forces Airman turned Air Force civilian, life is about looking forward to what you can do, not what you cannot.

Senior Airman Kolfage was on his second deployment for Operation IRAQI FREEDOM in 2004. After working a night shift at Balad Air Base, Iraq, he awoke the following afternoon. He left his tent to get some water and walked no more than 25 feet when the airbase came under a mortar attack—it would be the last time he would walk on the legs he was born with. A mortar shell landed about three feet from Airman Kolfage. He was thrown several feet in the air and landed against a wall of sandbags, still conscious, and began calling for help.

Airman Kolfage's best friend and tent mate had been thrown from his bed during the attack. He heard the screams and rushed outside to find his friend bloody and mangled. The Airman and a medic rushed to help Airman Kolfage, who was struggling to breathe with only one lung after the other had collapsed. Brian's friend desperately tried to divert his attention from the seriousness of his injuries, but calmly, Airman Kolfage assured him that he already knew the reality of the blow and that he just wanted to go home to his fiancée, who today is his wife.

An ambulance arrived and rushed him to the Balad Combat Support Hospital. The call for blood was announced over the base speakers, and fellow servicemembers rushed to the hospital by bus, bike or running on foot to give the blood that kept Brian alive. Thirty-six hours after being struck by the blast of that mortar, Airman Kolfage was medivaced to Walter Reed Medical Center, where his legs and right hand were amputated.

Despite suffering multiple amputations and the looming possibility of death, Airman Kolfage still maintained incredible strength and courage throughout his recovery. The fact that no one with his level of amputation has ever been able to walk independently didn't discourage him. With untainted spirit, he still saw opportunities and worked with feverish determination through his physical therapy program, where he practiced balance and strength with his transformed body.

Brian is now a civilian employee with the 355th Security Forces Squadron at Davis-Monthan Air Force Base, Ariz., and continues to echo that attitude as he makes great strides, both literally and figuratively, in learning how to walk with his prosthetics.

AIRMAN 1ST CLASS CHRISTIAN R. JACKSON



PORTRAITS
IN COURAGE



On a cold night in December 2005, 21-year old Christian Jackson's convoy rolled through an Iraqi village carrying supplies to Balad Air Base, Iraq. The Airman First Class deployed from Kirtland AFB, N.M., saw a muzzle flash and within moments, the night erupted with gun fire.

That night, Airman Jackson had traded his normal driving duties to be the gunner for the second gun truck, responsible for providing fire power and force protection for tractor trailers hauling the cargo. Driving was a fellow Airman, who coincidentally had attended high school with Airman Jackson in New York just a few short years before. Together, they and the other members of the convoy made their way through the village that night.

The first element of the convoy passed underneath an overpass when they were ambushed. Sensing tracer rounds and seeing muzzle flash to the left, the first gun truck sent up a red flare to alert the rest of the convoy that they were under fire. A white flare followed to illuminate the area.

In response, Airman Jackson then physically turned his turret and, in 40 seconds, unloaded 100 rounds from the .50 caliber weapon despite it jamming twice. When he ran out of ammunition, he went to the M-4 rifle and fired off 20 rounds until his gun truck was out of the kill zone. The following day there were six confirmed kills.

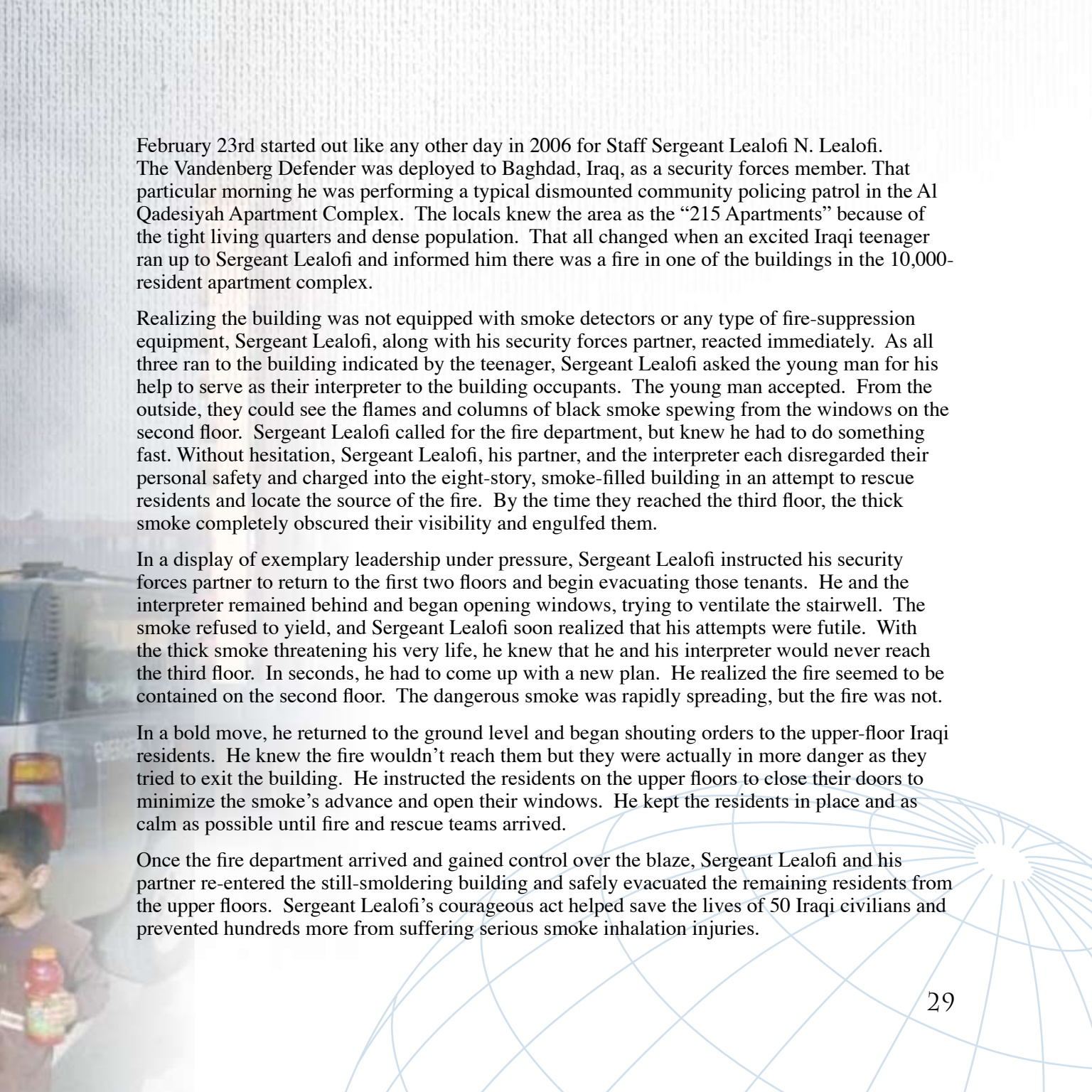
With only two short years in the Air Force, Airman Jackson handled the pressure of the moment like a seasoned veteran. It wasn't until after the incident was over that he realized the intensity of the danger he was in. "At the time, I was just concerned about laying down fire to protect everyone in the convoy," he said. The Airman remains close to many of the convoy members from that night, even though they returned to their separate bases. "The camaraderie there in Iraq was like nothing else."

STAFF SERGEANT LEALOFI N. LEALOFI



PORTRAITS
IN COURAGE





February 23rd started out like any other day in 2006 for Staff Sergeant Lealofi N. Lealofi. The Vandenberg Defender was deployed to Baghdad, Iraq, as a security forces member. That particular morning he was performing a typical dismounted community policing patrol in the Al Qadesiyah Apartment Complex. The locals knew the area as the “215 Apartments” because of the tight living quarters and dense population. That all changed when an excited Iraqi teenager ran up to Sergeant Lealofi and informed him there was a fire in one of the buildings in the 10,000-resident apartment complex.

Realizing the building was not equipped with smoke detectors or any type of fire-suppression equipment, Sergeant Lealofi, along with his security forces partner, reacted immediately. As all three ran to the building indicated by the teenager, Sergeant Lealofi asked the young man for his help to serve as their interpreter to the building occupants. The young man accepted. From the outside, they could see the flames and columns of black smoke spewing from the windows on the second floor. Sergeant Lealofi called for the fire department, but knew he had to do something fast. Without hesitation, Sergeant Lealofi, his partner, and the interpreter each disregarded their personal safety and charged into the eight-story, smoke-filled building in an attempt to rescue residents and locate the source of the fire. By the time they reached the third floor, the thick smoke completely obscured their visibility and engulfed them.

In a display of exemplary leadership under pressure, Sergeant Lealofi instructed his security forces partner to return to the first two floors and begin evacuating those tenants. He and the interpreter remained behind and began opening windows, trying to ventilate the stairwell. The smoke refused to yield, and Sergeant Lealofi soon realized that his attempts were futile. With the thick smoke threatening his very life, he knew that he and his interpreter would never reach the third floor. In seconds, he had to come up with a new plan. He realized the fire seemed to be contained on the second floor. The dangerous smoke was rapidly spreading, but the fire was not.

In a bold move, he returned to the ground level and began shouting orders to the upper-floor Iraqi residents. He knew the fire wouldn’t reach them but they were actually in more danger as they tried to exit the building. He instructed the residents on the upper floors to close their doors to minimize the smoke’s advance and open their windows. He kept the residents in place and as calm as possible until fire and rescue teams arrived.

Once the fire department arrived and gained control over the blaze, Sergeant Lealofi and his partner re-entered the still-smoldering building and safely evacuated the remaining residents from the upper floors. Sergeant Lealofi’s courageous act helped save the lives of 50 Iraqi civilians and prevented hundreds more from suffering serious smoke inhalation injuries.



