



# THE RAPTOR REPORT



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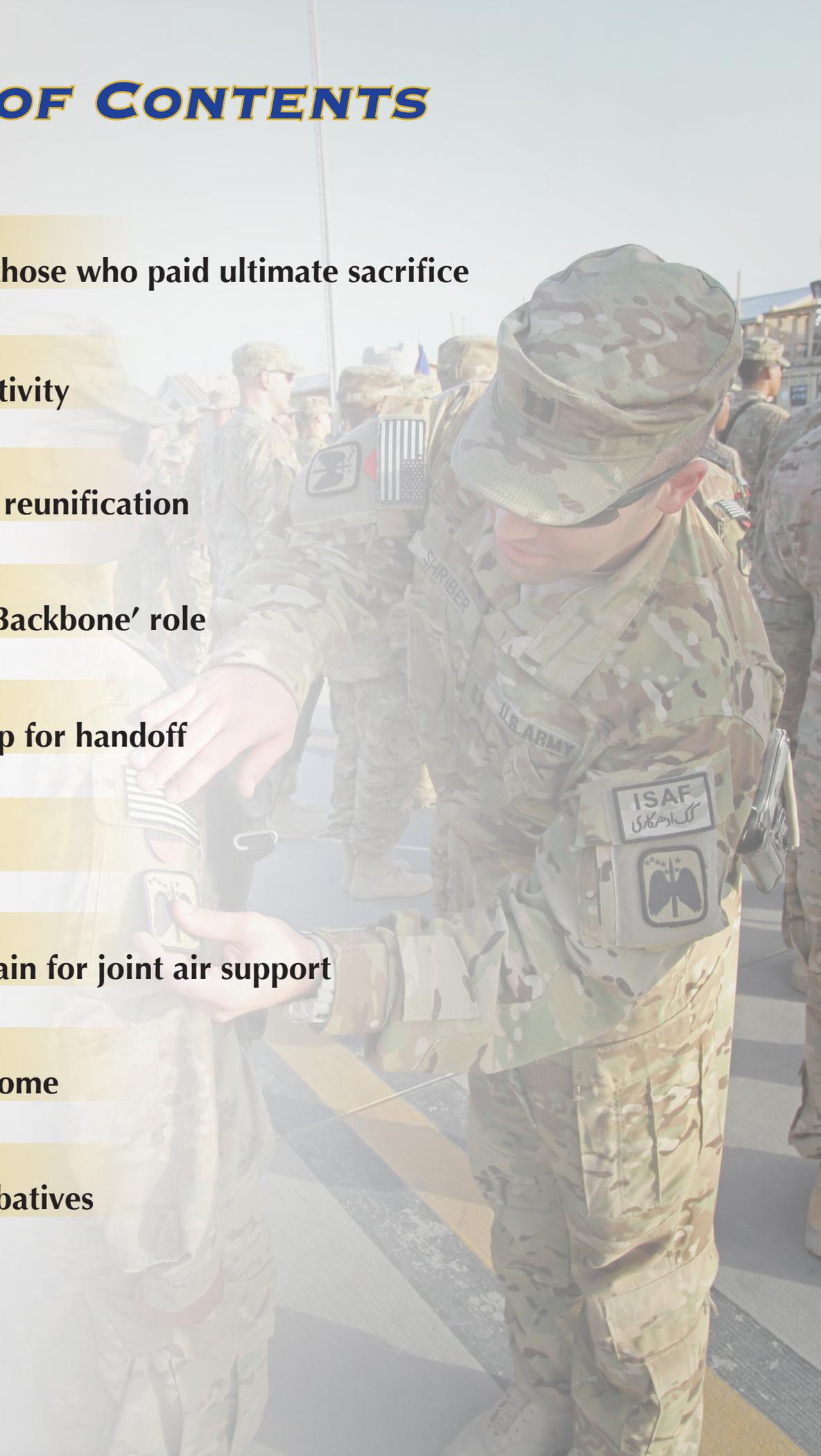
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# **TASK FORCE RAPTOR**

## **“SERVANT LEADERSHIP”**

**Task Force Raptor  
Commander**



**COL Paul A. Mele**

**Task Force Raptor  
Command Sergeant Major**



**CSM Stephen P. Tillman**



**TASK FORCE  
TIGERSHARK**

**Commander  
LTC Patrick Davis**

**Command Sergeant Major  
CSM Stephen Stapleton**

**TASK FORCE  
WARHAWK**

**Commander  
LTC Jason Miller**

**Command Sergeant Major  
CSM Marty Book**

**TASK FORCE  
FLYING DRAGONS**

**Commander  
LTC Thomas Barrett**

**Command Sergeant Major  
CSM Alex Woodell**

**4-6TH  
ARS**

**Commander  
LTC Brian Watkins**

**Command Sergeant Major  
CSM Stanley Williams**

**TASK FORCE  
BELLATOR**

**Commander  
LTC T. Christopher Petty**

**Command Sergeant Major  
CSM Stephen McCabe**

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Public Affairs Officer  
CPT Jesse A. Paulsboe

Public Affairs NCOIC  
SSG Bryan W. Lewis

# *Raptors remember Soldiers who paid ultimate sacrifice*

Story & photo by -  
Staff Sgt. B. Wesley Lewis

KANDAHAR AIRFIELD, Afghanistan – “If it be my lot to die, let me do so with courage and honor in a manner which will bring the greatest harm to the enemy and please, oh Lord, protect and guide those I shall leave behind,” an excerpt from “A Soldier’s Prayer” by Gen. George S Patton II.

Hundreds of Soldiers and civilians stationed at Kandahar Airfield participated in a Memorial Day prayer dinner May 26, hosted by the Task Force Raptor ministry team as a way to pay tribute to those who gave the ultimate sacrifice for their country.

“I think it’s especially important for Soldiers to recognize Memorial Day because the day should be about recognizing those whom have fallen before them,” said Col. Paul A. Mele, TF Raptor commander and event guest speaker. “Their (today’s Soldiers) honorable and committed service to the nation and their team mates is the best way to honor the fallen.”

The ceremony started with the audience singing “God Bless America” and “America, the Beautiful.”

“Memorial Day is a day of remembrance to me. I’ve deployed three times and during my first deployment, my unit lost 11 Soldiers and one interpreter ... who chose to come with us when he didn’t have to,” said Staff Sgt. Michael R. Campbell, TF Raptor chaplain’s assistant. For me it’s a day to remember all of those people who gave their lives ... to protect our country.”

Mele began his speech with biographies of those whose tombstones were visible on the prayer dinner poster displayed throughout the task



force’s work areas. The two veterans mentioned were Marine Cpl. Joshua D. Snyder and Marine Cpl. Norman Anderson, who both died in Iraq in 2005.

“As President Reagan once said, above all this nation must remain free,” Mele said. “The sacrifices they (those who died while in military service) made have allowed us the opportunities and abundances in America to choose any path we

want.”

The overall theme of Mele’s speech was about Soldiers displaying the traits of character, competency and commitment to honor the memory of the fallen.

“The people who have chosen to serve are some of the finest in our nation, and without all of the sacrifices they’ve made, our nation would be a very different place,” Mele added.

# Bellator sparks creativity



Photo by -  
Staff Sgt. Bryan W. Lewis

Story by -  
Spc. Reginald Graham

KANDAHAR AIRFIELD, Afghanistan – Sgt. Marshall R. Meeks, an allied trade specialist with Task Force Bellator, uses his creativity not only to enhance his unit’s mission effectiveness but also to raise his morale during a deployment to Kandahar Airfield.

Meeks enlisted as a metal worker in 2006. As the Army transitioned, his military occupational specialty was combined with machinist to produce a more versatile Soldier.

Meeks, a native of San Antonio, enlisted as a way to expand on abilities he had developed in his civilian life.

“I used to be a mechanic, build houses and was a free-lance contractor. I joined the Army to be a welder,” Meeks said.

Meeks, who is currently on his third deployment, has used his ingenuity combined with his MOS skills to complete a wide array of tasks

throughout his career.

“We had to build a 20-foot ECP (entry control point) gate. It consisted of 4-by-8 (feet) sheets of kevlar plates. We had to put 24 of the plates together,” Meeks said.

Meeks transitioned from supporting ground units most of his career to supporting Aviation with the 16th Combat Aviation Brigade.

His ability to weld, mold and create products from scratch makes him a high commodity amongst the unit’s logisticians, mechanics, crew chiefs, pilots and senior leaders.

“Being in a welding shop is a real spotlight. A lot of people get you to build a lot of different stuff,” Meeks said about the requests he receives. “They will give me a blueprint with tolerances ... as long as you make it to that print then you are good to go.”

Meeks supported Soldiers in his support battalion by building a cart to carry Hellfire missiles and their cases, which weighs almost 250 pounds each. Normally each one is carried by four Soldiers up to the length of a football field, but now the task only requires one Soldier rolling a cart.

“They brought me a picture of a guy that made a missile cart (on a previous deployment), but it didn’t carry the (case), it just had the missile on the cart. I made one so the whole (case) fit in there,” Meeks said. “You can just take the top off the (case) and have the bottom half roll under the wing of the (helicopter).”

When Meeks is not knocking out blueprints for missions, he is turning his military trade into a Donatello-like hobby. In the middle of a work area filled with blow torches, welding helmets and scrap metal

stands animal figurines.

“It was a job you either cut-up everything into small pieces and throw it away or create and make something out of it,” Meeks said.

Meeks uses everyone else’s scraps and his imagination to make his own masterpiece.

“Everybody (from my section) was off and we were looking at the parts, and we were like ‘let’s make something out of it,’” Meeks said.

Even though Meeks is deployed and constantly at his work bench creating things, whether leisurely or for the mission, he continues to build his future.

“My next big goal is to finish my schooling,” Meeks said. “I got 28 hours right now in Engineering and Welding Science.”

With 12-hour work days, constant request for missions and a continuation of bettering himself, Meeks has found a way to create an environment that enables individuality within the confines of the unit.

“You can make anything you want as long as you have imagination and the will to do it.”



Photo by -  
Staff Sgt. Bryan W. Lewis

# Stars align for Soler reunification



Story & photos by -  
Staff Sgt. B. Wesley Lewis

**A** little boy follows his father around an Army hangar, meeting crew chief members and climbing on Apache and Huey helicopters as a way to be a part of his dad's world.

Now, more than 20 years later, the roles have reversed as the father, a government contractor with the state department, follows his son, now a UH-60M Black Hawk helicopter pilot deployed with Task Force Raptor.

Chief Warrant Officer 2 Victor Antonio Soler reunited with his father, Victor A. Soler, after three years of

separation due to scheduling conflicts of missions and deployments.

The stars aligned in Afghanistan a couple weeks before Father's Day for Victor A. Soler, currently working out of Kabul, to work a one-for-one swap with another UH-1 Huey heli-

***"It's been about 16 years since we've got to do this," CW2 Soler said.***

***"It's been way too long," Mr. Soler replied.***

copter mechanic in Kandahar so he could be with his son.

"I'm glad that they (the Army) sent him down here this close to Kabul so that I could be with him for a while," Mr. Soler said.

During their time together, the

Soler duo spent every minute together, enjoying everything from touring the flight lines to watching movies, drinking coffee and reminiscing.

"It's been about 16 years since we've got to do this," CW2 Soler said as he looked at his dad.

"It's been way too long," Mr. Soler replied.

The senior Soler is a Vietnam veteran who eventually retired as an Aviation first sergeant,

settling in Enterprise, Ala. His son followed him into the military in 1999 but started on a different path as an Airman before transferring over to the Army.

"It surprised me that he went into the Air Force, because he knew how



the Army was,” Mr. Soler said as he chuckled. “He spent 10 years in the Air Force and then switched over as a pilot. I was extremely proud of him.”

His father’s push for his son to reach for the stars prompted, at the time technical sergeant Soler, to put in an Aviation warrant officer application.

“In 2007, it was Christmas and I was back home. My dad was home on break and I asked him ‘how come you never put in an (Aviation) packet?’ He said if he was me, he’d put it in and if it’s meant to be, then it’s meant to be,” CW2 Soler said.

After watching his son deploy to Iraq in 2003, Mr. Soler missed the military atmosphere so decided to begin his new career as a government contractor, spending a large part of his time overseas. But that never stopped him from being there for his son’s military milestones.

“Today is June 6 so it was six years ago today that he came home and pinned me with my WO1 (warrant officer 1). He came on his non-break time so it felt great to have him there to support me,” CW2 Soler said while hanging out on the flight line with his

father. “It’s pretty unique to be here together six years later.”

The last time that father and son stood in the same spot was in a bunker in Kirkuk, Iraq; however, it was four years apart. Mr. Soler entered a bunker the bunker in 2007 to see “Victor Soler was here” written on the wall. He added “so was dad.”

Even with the infrequent meetings between father and son, Mr. Soler’s advice and impact in his son’s life is consistent.

“I told him to treat people how you want to be treated, and listen to your crew chiefs,” Mr. Soler stated.

“They (CW2 Soler’s crew chiefs) all know my dad was a crew chief so they tell me I have to watch it or they’ll tell on me to my dad if I do something bad,” CW2 Soler added. “My dad always told me to stay positive no matter how bad of a day you’re having.”

The father got to watch his son in action as he flew an American flag around the base in his Black Hawk, and afterwards they shared in a special military moment

of folding it together.

Little did Mr. Soler know that his son would present it to him during a dinner at the end of their time together.

“My dad has never seen me fly until he came out here so that was great,” CW2 Soler said. “The flag itself means a lot. This one has been on every mission with me, and he’ll be able to take it back home.”



# RAPTORS CROSS INTO 'BACKBONE' ROLE



Story & photo by -  
Staff Sgt. B. Wesley Lewis

KANDAHAR AIRFIELD, Afghanistan – “I will not forget, nor will I allow my comrades to forget that we are professionals, noncommissioned officers, leaders!”

Task Force Raptor held a noncommissioned officers induction ceremony June 13 where 22 recently promoted sergeants throughout the brigade were welcomed into the “backbone of the Army.”

This event marks the first-ever NCO induction ceremony for Task Force Raptor, which is designated the 16th Combat Aviation Brigade when stationed at its home in Joint Base Lewis-McChord, Wash.

“I haven’t got to see this a lot, especially in Afghanistan,” said Sgt. Timothy Wooden, from Niagara Falls, N.Y. “When someone ask me where I did mine, I get to say Kandahar, Afghanistan.”

Before the inductees took their right-of-passage, they were presented with a skit called “A Soldier’s Request,” where junior enlisted Soldiers responded to examples of bad leadership with requests for guidance, respect and training.

“How you operate, how you lead and the legacy and foundation that you build with them as a young warrior makes all the difference in the world,” said Command Sgt. Maj. David M. Clark, the event’s guest speaker.

The level of responsibility for a Soldier significantly increases because they are charged with the training, accountability and welfare of junior Soldiers.

“People look up to you more ... now that you have sergeant (rank) on your chest,” Wooden said.

Then a representative from every NCO rank, starting with sergeant and going to command sergeant major, posted on the stage and recited the scope of responsibilities that comes with their rank.

“The biggest influence for me as far as being an NCO has been my father because he was a first sergeant,” said

Wooden, who was promoted to sergeant three months prior.

Next, the inductees received inspiration and guidance from Clark, the Regional Command South and 4th Infantry Division command sergeant major.

“Life is a test. Life is about trust. Life is a temporary assignment,” Clark began his speech to the inductees. “As a young leader, you’re going to be tested throughout this military journey.”

Be a leader of strong character. Think about the leader that you would want to lead you.”

Each inductee passed through an NCO archway that displayed all of the NCO ranks. As they came through to the other side, they were greeted by Clark and Command Sgt. Maj. Stephen D. Tillman, TF Raptor command sergeant major, with “welcome to the Corps.”

“Today, a torch has been passed to you (inductees),” Clark said. “It’s a relay race ... run it to your fullest ability. Only you can run that race and your Soldiers will be running that race with you.”

Finally, the NCOs in the audience joined the inductees as they professed their commitment by reciting the NCO Creed.

“The NCO I hope to be is one that trains Soldiers tactically and help them out personally as well,” Wooden said. “I want to be more proficient in my job and well-rounded as an NCO.”

## NCO INDUCTEES

Sgt. Timothy Wooden  
Sgt. Devin Alvarez  
Sgt. Jeremie Deguzman  
Sgt. Cody Grabowski  
Sgt. Tiffany Kahapea  
Sgt. Thomas Kersh  
Sgt. Benjamin Manalo  
Sgt. Daniel Backus

Sgt. Nicholas Bromelow  
Sgt. Andrew Chadwick  
Sgt. Eric Coday  
Sgt. Clarence Kinble  
Sgt. Daniel Ledbetter  
Sgt. Javier Montemayor  
Sgt. Daniel Moore

Sgt. Timothy Morris  
Sgt. Damian Weaver  
Sgt. Jeb Butler  
Sgt. Sara Culver  
Sgt. George Edwards  
Sgt. Scot Haitt  
Sgt. Vincent Villalobas

# Shindand tower prepped for handoff



Story & photo by -  
Staff Sgt. B. Wesley Lewis

KANDAHAR AIRFIELD, Afghanistan - As the presence of U.S. troops begins to draw down in Afghanistan, units begin to transition and pass off security operations to the Afghan military forces, which includes control of the land and sky.

Air traffic controllers from Company F, 1-52nd General Support Aviation Battalion under Task Force Warhawk have been on watch over the skies around Shindand Air Base since April 2014, and instead of preparing to hand off operations to a follow-on U.S. unit, they are training one of the first Afghan military air

traffic controllers.

"Anywhere the U.S. goes we have the responsibility to build the capability and capacity of our partner forces," said Lt. Col. Jason Miller, TF Warhawk commander. "We're making sure we set the conditions so the Afghan forces can take over the roles of ATC and the responsibility of running an airfield."

Soldiers and noncommissioned officers of the Arctic Fox Company have been training Afghanistan Air Force 1st Lt. Alishah Rahimi since May 2014 to progress through an ATC program that will allow him to work to his superiors' expectations and beyond.

"What he'll be doing is called an advisory control tower. In an advisory control tower, you don't provide clearances," said Sgt. 1st Class Shawn Redondo, Shindand tower facility commander chief. "You provide traffic calls. You can provide weather advisories. You are there to mitigate risks and assist the pilots."

Within a few training sessions, Redondo and his team recognized Rahimi's potential to surpass previously set guidelines.

"At the very beginning, we were only going to train him in advisory but when we started working with him, I sat down with my Italian counterparts and asked 'What are my left and right limits?' They said he is my Soldier so train him as I see fit," Redondo said. "So I sat down with 1st Lt. Rahimi and told him 'I want to make sure you can do ATC anywhere you go.'"

Redondo and his ATC team used air traffic controller regulations and pulled relevant material to design a manual for qualifying Rahimi as an ATC for an advisory control tower.

"What we provide is positive control, so when you enter our airspace, you have to talk to us and you have to be in two-way communication with the tower at all times. We give landing clearances ... clear airspace ... we are the sole owner of five miles outside of SAB," Redondo explained.

As Rahimi continued to soar through each portion of his training, which included flight data, ground data and local control, his instructors pushed for further testing to allow Rahimi to be a self-sufficient ATC.

"One thing that we're trying to do is get him an International Civil Aviation Organization rating. I am an FAA examiner but I'm not qualified to say he can work by himself over here, so we're trying to get myself to be an ICAO examiner or have one of the Italian examiners come down to check him off to be a positive controller," Redondo said.

The air traffic controllers of Company F and Rahimi continue to work together as a bridge between two countries and adding another piece to the puzzle that is a self-sustaining Afghanistan.

**RAPTORS IN ACTION**



Photo by -  
Staff Sgt. Bryan W. Lewis



Photo by -  
Staff Sgt. Bryan W. Lewis



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Staff Sgt. Bryan W. Lewis



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Staff Sgt. Bryan W. Lewis

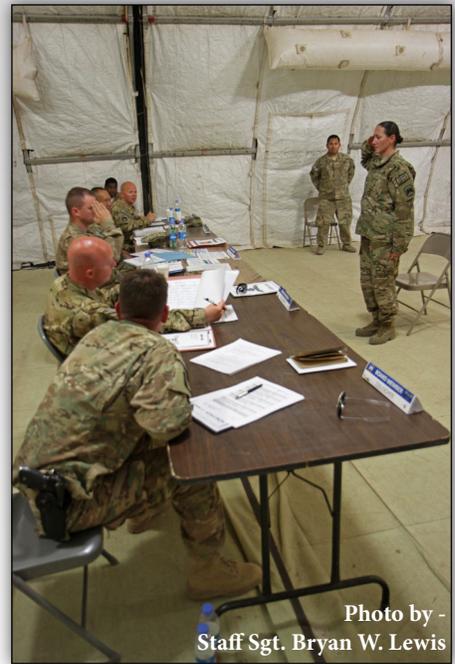


Photo by -  
Staff Sgt. Bryan W. Lewis



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Photo by -  
Staff Sgt. Bryan W. Lewis



Photo by -  
Capt. Jesse A. Paulsboe

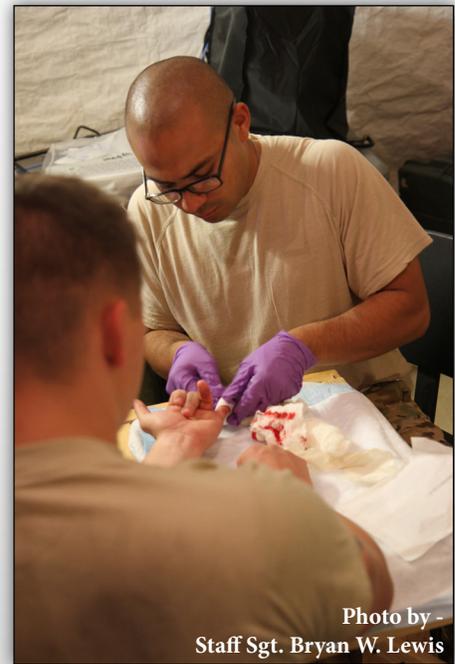


Photo by -  
Staff Sgt. Bryan W. Lewis

**RAPTORES IN ACTION**



# DART to the rescue

Story & photos by -  
Staff Sgt. B. Wesley Lewis

KANDAHAR AIRFIELD, Afghanistan – Proactive beats reactive in the military especially when preparing for the worst-case scenario. In the world of Aviation, preparation to react to a downed aircraft can mean the difference between life and death for the crew and passengers.

Twenty-two members of Task Force Raptor's downed aircraft recovery team strengthened their technical abilities and communication skills while training on scrap vehicles on Kandahar Airfield, Afghanistan June 22.

The Raptor DART program, led by TF Bellator and consisting of Soldiers from every battalion, is responsible for extracting personnel from a downed aircraft using high-powered equipment.

"Everybody is excited because they're on DART ... their unit has that much trust and confidence in that we'll accomplish the mission," said Staff Sgt. Erik E. Lopez, an aviation hydraulics repair noncommissioned officer and DART team leader.



Lopez, a native of Phoenix, was one of three personnel who started the program and now, along with other instructors, is responsible for selecting and training members who can handle extreme situations based around various helicopter airframes.

Soldiers are selected for the additional duty based on a high-proficiency in their military occupational specialty. Some Soldiers volunteered in support of the aerial mission in southern Afghanistan.

“On my first deployment, I focused on becoming proficient at my job,” said Spc. Justin R. Corwin, a TF Belator aircraft powertrain mechanic. “Now I’m trying to take a step forward in my career and try something new.”

I volunteered for DART because I have experience in my shop on multiple airframes, so I have a general idea on disassembling an aircraft and with what’s safe and not safe.”

Instructors pushed their new members outside their comfort zones by putting dangerous tools in their hands and reinforcing the urgency of removing people from a life-threatening situation.

“The objective we had was to teach these guys how to think on their feet. We used the concept, ‘Treat it as if it were your own family member stuck in the vehicle. What would you do to get them out of that vehicle?’ Lopez stated. “You have to think of it in that aspect so when you get to the site.”

Soldiers were introduced to using basic tools such as a crowbar and sledgehammer as well as heavy-duty equipment to pierce through tougher conditions.

“We used the Jaws of Life and portable gasoline saws to teach these guys how to cut certain joints of an aircraft to make it easier to pull a pilot or passengers out of a downed aircraft,” Lopez said.

Two pickup trucks with smashed-in doors were presented for groups to rotate through until nothing remained except a pile of random pieces.

“As far as material goes, it varies depending on the type of aircraft. On an aircraft, you deal with a lot of composite and titanium so the way it burns is different,” Lopez pointed out. “With the vehicles we used, it was a lot harder because it gave them an opportunity to think of how to approach it instead of us saying ‘cut here, cut there.’”

“Every type of vehicle has a frame, so working on the trucks helped us think about working on the cockpit of Black Hawks, Apaches and other airframes,” added Corwin, a native of Fresno, Calif.

Once Soldiers became familiar with the basic use of each tool, groups had to learn how to work together by using the appropriate tool at the right time.

“The Jaws of Life is a very heavy piece of equipment. It’s very powerful and slow moving,” Corwin said. “You can lift it but when actually trying to use it in a precise area, you need two

operators.”

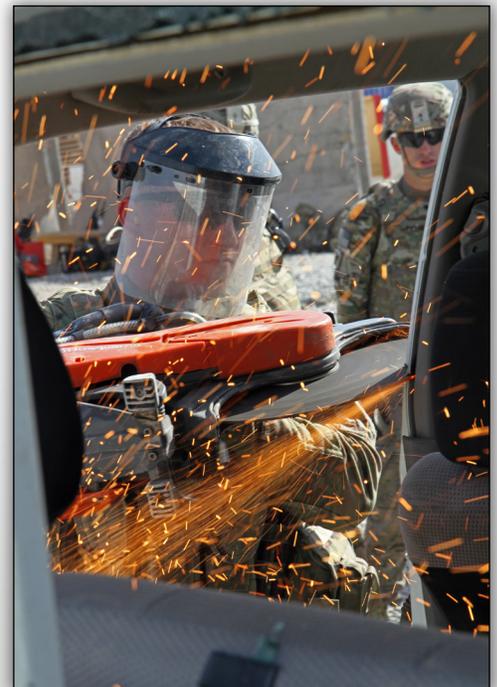
“Everybody has to learn how to communicate because if I’m holding the saw and he’s got the crowbar, I’m thinking where I have to cut and where I’m going to need help. I also have to be telling my guy where to pull,” Lopez added.

Pieces of unrecognizable vehicles continued to be tossed into a pile as Soldiers became comfortable with the crunching power of the Jaws of Life as well as the fireworks of sparks produced by the saw.

“As the day progressed, they got to understand the limits of the tools, how to use them and they were thinking about where they needed to be by this point instead of looking at the instructor,” Lopez said.

Two piles of scrap metal sat where two trucks once existed in the morning. Soldiers who started the day with uncertainty ended feeling accomplished about the serious task they might have to perform.

“People should stay open-minded and think about doing it more as a civil service to help your brothers and sisters in arms. It’s a bad situation that nobody wants to do but has to be done,” Corwin said.



# SOLDIERS, MARINES TRAIN FOR JOINT AIR SUPPORT

Story & photos by -  
Staff Sgt. B. Wesley Lewis

KANDAHAR AIRFIELD, Afghanistan - Aviators from Task Force Tigershark and Marines from the 1st Air Naval Gunfire Liaison Company finished conducting the first iteration of joint communications training that lasted the month of June.

The multi-phase training involved AH-64E Apache helicopter and OH-58D Kiowa Warrior helicopter pilots from TF Tigershark and a Marine Corps fire support team, who are liaisons with the Georgian 10 Special Mountain Battalion at Kandahar Airfield, to focus on the interoperability of joint forces in a mission to call for air support in various scenarios.

“On the Tigershark side, there is a gap in the understanding between what we’re normally used to doing, which has worked with supporting the ground force commander, and utilizing the close-combat attack format, which anybody can do,” said Army Chief Warrant Officer 4 Robert J. Teague, TF Tigershark master gunner and Apache pilot.



“It was a collaborative training effort. We contacted them (TF Tigershark), deciding it would behoove them to receive some training from us, and we would benefit from more integrated training with them,” added Marine Corps Capt. William Brown, fire power control team leader.

## UNDERSTANDING DOCTRINE

The first portion of the training focused on the understanding of the joint doctrine and terminology for calling in air support.

“We started with the academics of the difference between Marine JTAC (joint terminal attack controllers) and other services that maintain that same capability, which includes the Air Force and special operations,” Brown said.

The variations in close-air-support reports allow aviation units to modify standard operation procedures to complement their branch -internal missions.

“As a community, we are required to know the five-line close-air-support format and the nine-line close-air-support format. But the process that

revolves around those two formats is something that we weren’t really familiar with prior to this training exercise,” Teague explained.

What we’re looking at is the transition out of the counter-insurgency fight into the next fight, which could be a combination of conventional and counter-insurgency operations. Once we come out of here, we need to be proficient with operating in a joint environment.”

The 12-step CAS process is a standard within the Marine Corps fire power control teams, which is indoctrinated at their expeditionary warfare training centers.

“It is the template that we utilize for aircraft and controllers on the ground when interacting with each other. Within there, includes a step-by-step process that informs each individual of their role in the process. That way everyone has an understanding of the flow of information prior to showing up for the live-fire portion of the training,” Brown explained.

The first priority of a mission involving various units from multiple branches operating in the same battle space is clarifying language and ter-



minology.

“The more difficult part of the classes is the language that we use ... the brevity terms,” Brown explained. “One of the shortfalls that we identified is that the brevity that they (Army pilots) utilize and the brevity that we utilize are not typically the same.”

There are many small differences that we (JTAC) can adjust to, being the ground force that is requesting support. There are other things that are habits that are ingrained in us as well as joint forces for control in terminal phases.”

With a fire support unit coordinating aerial assets in order to engage targets, attack operations become complex. The usage of extended reports clears up the scenario and allows for cross-communication between pilots.

“We’re finding out in a lot of ways it’s very controlled, but there is a reason it’s very controlled,” Teague said. “Depending on the situation, there may be an attack-weapons team, a scout-weapons team ... there may be UAVs (unmanned aerial vehicle) on station or there may be fixed-wing aircraft. Everyone could be very stacked up.”

## TEST OUTSIDE THE WIRE

With the pilots and the fire support team synchronized under the same doctrine and communication lingo, the next phase in the training was the complex exercise of testing joint close air support in the field. The live-fire exercise involved multiple branches



from different countries to employ different helicopter airframes, using a variation of attack methods.

“The goal of the operations was to insert a (U.S.) Marine and Georgian team to an OP (observation point) in the vicinity of a location that has previously been approved for aviation ordnance,” Brown said. “Then we contacted aircraft during their normal flight times and provided them a targeting brief, where they check in with us. We give them an update on the ground situation and then we provide them a targeting coordinates on an identified hostile target.”

Located at a firing range several kilometers outside of Kandahar Airfield, pilots engaged notional targets based off of a scenario given by the JTAC on site. Brown and his team changed the situation and target type each round to give pilots the ability to adjust to parameters per the nine-line report and execute the mission.

“When we (pilots) check in, we are told to go over here. We are told this is going to be this type of engagement, using this type of weapon system,” Teague said. “In this situation, they (fire support team) are familiar enough with our weapons systems and they are familiar enough with whatever target they want to engage.”

Another tool that the Marine JTAC incorporated into the live-fire scenarios was the use of a ground-based laser targeting system, which differs from Army pilots’ normal protocol.

“That is something extra to practice in the sense that we are going outside of something we are comfortable with,” Teague added. “If we’re engaging an air defense artillery system and there’s a JTAC on the ground that has the capability to laze that system, you can launch a missile without ever really seeing the target.”

Two daytime live-fire iterations allowed for a proper, in-depth assess-



ment of the training from the classroom to the field and from the ground to the sky.

“There were some bumps in the road but the aviators, whether it be the Kiowa Warrior pilots or the Apache pilots, began to really understand the process after a few iterations. The success was a combination of the academics, how the training was set up and the debrief of the aircrews when they got back.”

“It was very good to see the progress. It was substantial in actual measure from the amount of comprehension and interaction we had with the pilots,” Brown added. “The degree to which they were able to take on the new tactics, the new verbiage the new process ... discuss it among themselves and then employ it is very commendable.”

TF Tigershark plans to continue with the joint training while in theater to build their proficiency for their next assignment.

“We want to walk out of theater familiar to where you could put the 1-229th (Attack Helicopter Battalion) on a carrier, send us into the Pacific somewhere, tie us in with a JTAC and we’ll be able to function,” Teague concluded.



# 'DUSTOFF' TAKES OFF HOME MEDEVACS CHANGE OUT IN SHINDAND

Story & photos by -  
Staff Sgt. B. Wesley Lewis

KANDAHAR AIRFIELD, Afghanistan - When Task Force Warhawk picked up its deployment mission at Shindand Airfield, Afghanistan in April 2014, they took on the medical evacuation capabilities of Company G, 2-135th General Support Aviation Battalion.

Company G, which was originally integrated with Task Force Nightmare in January 2014, participated in a transfer of authority ceremony July 19, where they passed off their mission to Company C, 5-158th GSAB out of Germany.

Lt. Col. Jason L. Miller, TF Warhawk commander, presided over the ceremony and highlighted the effect that Company G had on Regional Command West and RC-South by conducting more than 135 MEDEVAC missions and more than 600 support, training and maintenance flights. All together, "Dus-

toff" company totaled more than 1700 flight hours.

"Golf Company, you have served this command and this area of responsibility well. You're scope of responsibility on the battlefield has by far been larger than most, spanning multiple regional commands and multiple task force headquarters," Miller stated in his speech. "However, you tackled those responsibilities with ease and thoroughly built trust within our organization and with the forces of whose lives you saved."

The unit's 109 Soldiers from the Kansas, Colorado and Utah National Guard tallied two Bronze Star Medals, 89 Air Medals and 16 Army Commendation Medals.

"Amazingly you were able to bring people from three organizations together into one cohesive unit. We especially appreciated you living up to your motto and being 'All In' in everything you do," Miller added.

Company C arrives as a member of TF Warhawk and TF Raptor after conducting joint training with the U.S. Army Special Forces, Norwegian special forces, Belgian special forces and 212th Combat Support Hospital. They also conducted high altitude mountainous environment



training on two occasions.

"Charlie Company, you've trained hard, proven that you're up to the task and we know that the mission is in good hands," Miller said. "You're now first up. The flight is yours so stay true to your motto to ensure 'Death Can Wait.'"

# Talons dig into combatives



**Story & photos by -  
Staff Sgt. B. Wesley Lewis**

KANDAHAR AIRFIELD, Afghanistan - As the U.S. presence in Afghanistan draws down, units stay vigilant in their mission and training to secure the stability of Afghanistan and its people. Part of this enormous task involves the individual combat readiness of each Soldier.

Task Force Warhawk leadership has provided an opportunity for their Soldiers to be certified level-one under the Modern Army Combatives Program while stationed at Shindand Airfield, Afghanistan.

"MACP is specifically for if you're outside the wire and you're attacked where you can't use your weapon. You have to use hand-to-hand combat," said Pfc. Austin Reed, a level-one graduate of the TF Warhawk combatives program. "It's designed to work in a real environment, in a real situation."

The resources at Shindand Airfield provided instructors with a gym, protective equipment and time to develop the training.

"Once we (TF Warhawk) got settled down out here, I briefed the com-

mander on my intentions on coming up with a program. He gave me the green light and I went for it," said Sgt. Maria Acuna, a level-three MACP instructor.

The course was set up by Acuna, a native of Phoenix, as a longer variation of the course that is held in the U.S. in order to meet all criteria while also taking on deployment operations.

"Level-one combatives is a 40-hour block of instruction that is usually ran for eight hours a day for five days," Acuna explained. "But because we're here and because the Soldiers need to carry on with the mission, we decided to divide the 40 hours up into two and a half hour blocks."

Acuna, who certified more than 40 Warhawks in level-one prior to their deployment, certified six volunteers in her first class.

"They're motivated. They're there because they want to be there," Acuna emphasized. "They're doing their best to learn the techniques and to understand the concepts, and they put a lot of effort into passing the course."

"Sgt. Acuna always stresses basics ... technique ... and that the main

goal is to keep your distance to use your weapon, but if you have to get close, you'll be more prepared," said Reed, a native of Abilene, Kan.

Some Soldiers look at the opportunity as a way to improve their hand-to-hand combat capabilities while others look for a way to pass the time.

"It's an outlet being out here. It gives the Soldier an opportunity to focus on something they like as a stress release," Acuna said. "At the end of the day, it gives them something else to talk about other than their usual routine."

"I love martial arts. My stepdad was a mixed martial artist and he taught me," Reed said. "The Modern Army Combatives Program is the only structured training I've ever had for learning techniques."

Acuna plans to continue the training by providing additional courses to allow additional members of TF Warhawk the chance to become level-one certified in MACP and become a more well-rounded Soldier while in Afghanistan.



