



THE POW ★ MIA MISSION NEWSLETTER

A Publication of Rolling Thunder® Chapter 1 Florida

Volume 6 Issue XXXIX

June 2021



THE MAJOR FUNCTION OF ROLLING THUNDER ® INC. IS TO PUBLICIZE THE POW*MIA ISSUE: TO EDUCATE THE PUBLIC THAT MANY AMERICAN PRISONERS OF WAR WERE LEFT BEHIND AFTER ALL PREVIOUS WARS, AND TO HELP CORRECT THE PAST AND TO PROTECT FUTURE VETERANS FROM BEING LEFT BEHIND SHOULD THEY BECOME PRISONERS OF WAR-MISSING IN ACTION. WE ARE ALSO COMMITTED TO HELPING AMERICAN VETERANS FROM ALL WARS.

FROM THE EDITOR



Bob Ericson
Writer / Editor / Publisher

April and May of this year have been the busiest the Chapter has been since it's inception. The Brevard County School Board project saw its last flag raising on June 8th, our eighty seventh. Apparently one school was overlooked in the initial planning.

During this time, we were also planning the largest event in Rolling Thunder® Florida history - the Ride for Freedom XXXIII event on Memorial Day weekend. The first thing we did was organize a steering committee, and relied on the talents of the team members to carry out all of the program requirements. We appointed (Dr) Lance Armstrong as the Chairman of the committee, and he was supported by Cindy Flowers (VP) as entertainment director; Dorothy Walsh, our media guru; Marylou Wade (Gold Star Family) provided all of the graphic designs, logos, and printing needs, Mike Mullin's security team, and Mike Schulze (Secretary) - communications. Our partners at the Veterans Memorial Center through member Donn Weaver, also the Chairman of the Brevard Veterans Council, overwhelmingly supported our vision, and through a lot of detailed planning, they worked tirelessly to make this a totally remarkable community event. We cannot begin to thank them enough for what they provided. And to the Chapter's volunteers - this event would not have been possible without your help and dedication to the project.

We also acknowledge all of our brothers and sisters from the rest of the Rolling Thunder®

Best wishes to the following members who have birthday's this month:

Don Marn	06/09	Mike Barber	06/20
Colleen Ward	06/12	Christina Bell	06/24
Ty Barker	06/14	Max Clapp	06/25
Terry Schmelzle	06/17	James Justice	06/28
Ernest Wagner	06/18		

Chapters who supported the event, and participated throughout the weekend. And of course our State Liaison, Ray Addison who made sure that the Patriot Guard moving Vietnam Wall, and the Global War on Terror memorials were here, as a testament and tribute to the men and women who have made the ultimate sacrifice in defense of our freedoms.

This month, The Mission Newsletter will publish its 39th and final issue. Going forward, I want to thank everyone who saw the value in this publication over the past several years.

Bob Ericson

IN THIS ISSUE

Cover	Page 1
From the editor	Page 2
A note from the Chaplin	Page 3
Inside the Chapter	Page 4
Welcome home	Page 5
Inside the Chapter (continued)	Page 6
This month in history	Page 7
Featured story	Page 8-11
Sponsors	Page 12-13

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FROM THE CHAPLIN - CHIP HANSON

As your Chaplain, also a Marine Corp combat Veteran, I find the division of our Great Nation, abhorrent, that our 245-year-old society is in a state of unrest, to a point of anger, hatred, and even violence. It appears that our great society is breaking at the seams.

This is not the first time that we have been at odds with each other. When I returned from Vietnam, after a 13-month tour of duty. Our great Nation was very angry. Mostly at those of us who served, and wore the uniform. It remained that way until 1990 when the first President Bush conducted Operation Desert Storm.

Our Nation once again found its patriotic pride and support. Eleven years later on 9-11-2001 we were attacked in New York at the Twin Towers in Washington DC at the Pentagon and another attack was stopped by some very brave airline passengers who gave their lives to keep the airliner from attacking who knows where and what,

For the first time since WWII, we as a nation were angry! This time at an unknown enemy that was hiding in a far off land. But, we came together as a nation. It did not matter who you were, or what you believed in, we had been attacked. Our loyalty to our Country and to each other lasted for about 15 years. In the last 4 or 5 months, our nation has evolved into a nation that is worse now than at any time in modern history.

To all who reads this, please set aside all of our discriminatory feelings beliefs, angers and hatreds whether you are Jew, Christian, Agnostic or a nonbeliever, Democrat or Republican, Our Nation was formed for the benefit all who are Citizens of the

U S A.

We can and we must show a display of unity, not only in meetings, but also when we are in public discussing anything concerning us or our Country. And hopefully others will follow by example.

Philippians 2:3 ESV

Do nothing from rivalry or conceit, but in humility count others more significant than yourselves.

GOD BLESS AMERICA

Chaplain Chip Hanson

Ed note:

Chaplain Hanson is also a member of the Disabled American Veterans Space Coast Chapter 123, which is another tenant in the Veterans Memorial Center. The DAV is the place for veterans to go with questions about benefits, or to file veteran benefit claims.



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POW * MIA - YOU ARE NOT FORGOTTEN

INSIDE THE CHAPTER - RIDE FOR FREEDOM XXXIII IN PHOTOS



WELCOME HOME - EM3 LESLIE P DELLES



After nearly 80 years, the remains of a Navy sailor from St. Charles, IL, killed in the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor that triggered American entry into World War II have been identified.



(TRIBUNE Photo.)
Leslie (left) and Lester Delles,

The remains of Navy Electrician's Mate 3rd Class Leslie P. Delles, who was assigned to the USS Oklahoma before the United States entered World War II, were identified on Feb. 12, according to a news release from the Defense POW/MIA Accounting Agency.

A Tribune story from when Delles enlisted in March 1940 said he and his twin brother, Lester Delles, joined the Navy on the same day, as a way to each learn a different trade. Delles joined to learn aviation mechanics, while Lester Delles joined to study electricity, according to the article.

Leslie Delles was 21 years old when he was killed Dec. 7, 1941, when the USS Oklahoma, moored at Ford Island in Pearl Harbor, suffered torpedo hits from a Japanese aircraft. The attack killed 429 crewmen, including Delles. "While They Were Young

- A History of St. Charles and Her Service Personnel 1940-1945," by Kevin Gaffney, says that while he was assigned to the Oklahoma, Lester Delles was not aboard the ship at the time of the attack and continued his Navy service.

Navy personnel recovered remains of the deceased crewmen from December 1941 to June 1944 and placed them in the Halawa and Nu'uauu cemeteries. The American Graves Registration Service disinterred the remains in September 1947 and moved them to the Central Identification Laboratory at Schofield Barracks for identification.

"The laboratory staff was only able to confirm the identifications of 35 men from the USS Oklahoma at that time," according to the news release.

The unidentified remains were buried at the National Memorial Cemetery of the Pacific, known as the Punchbowl, in Honolulu.

Delles, along with all those who could not be identified, was classified as nonrecoverable by the military board.

After the remains were disinterred in 2015, scientists from the DPAA used anthropological analysis and scientists from the Armed Forces Medical Examiner System used mitochondrial DNA and Y chromosome DNA analysis to identify Delles' remains, according to the release.

Delles' name was recorded on the Courts of the Missing at the Punchbowl, along with others who are missing from WWII.

"A rosette will be placed next to his name to indicate he has been accounted for," the DPAA said.

Through the Navy Service Casualty Office, Delles' family declined to comment.

Delles will be buried on Oct. 23 in Sutter Creek, California. His personnel profile can be viewed here.

WELCOME HOME SAILOR

When one American is not worth the effort to be found, we as Americans have lost.

INSIDE THE CHAPTER - RIDE FOR FREEDOM XXXIII *(continued)*

There are about 1.5 million veterans living in Florida according to a 2019 report, and nearly 65,500 of them live in Brevard County. Many of them are members of at least one other Veteran specific organization such as the American Legion, or Veterans of Foreign Wars. Thanks to the efforts of the Veterans Memorial Center, many of these facilities were contacted and invited to attend the Memorial Day weekend event. Although attendance was less than expected, we still consider it a 'ride to remember' with nearly 1,000 motorcycles leaving the designated mall parking lot.

Florida Rolling Thunder® Chapters made monetary contributions to a State Fund to use for the weekend event, but many private, corporate, and individual donors to Chapter 1 made it possible for the Chapter to pay all of the expenses without using any proceeds from the State Fund. Not only did we not use any of the State money, we were able to double the money in the Fund - to be used for future state-wide events.

We also acknowledge and appreciate U-Haul Moving and Storage on S Sykes Creek Parkway for allocating parking spaces on their property for our use throughout the weekend. To the Boy Scouts for setting up hundreds of chairs in front of the stage, and making sure the trash cans were emptied - thank you. And, to the 35 individual vendors and food truck that kept our visitors fed and hydrated on Saturday - thank you. To the County Property Appraisers office for their support - Thank you!

Although I mentioned several members of the steering committee, it's only fitting to acknowledge those members who stood out in the sun and heat for hours on end directing traffic, and those who made sure our Chapter booth was manned, and products restocked, and to those who made sure that all of the riders were registered, you have made your Chapter proud and have set a new standard in volunteerism.

I also want to recognize Tom Grinels, of Chapter 5 Florida who provided the 40' American flag, and arranged for a crane to hoist it - where it proudly waved across the Veterans Memorial Plaza.

Lastly, to Armstrong Chiropractic of Cocoa Beach, MedFast Urgent Care | Walk In Clinic's, and the Military Officers Association of America, Cape Canaveral Chapter, whose donations made it possible to bring this community event to Brevard, we thank you for your continued support of this Chapter and our mission.



"Let us never forget that government is ourselves and not an alien power over us. The ultimate rulers of our democracy are not a President and senators and congressmen and government officials, but the voters of this country." - Franklin D. Roosevelt



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THIS MONTH IN HISTORY - JUNE

In the early Roman calendar, June only had 29 days. It was Julius Caesar who added the additional day giving June 30 days.

June 2, 1966: First US space probe "Surveyor 1" has a soft landing on the moon,

June 3, 1965: Major Edward H. White II, USAF became the first American to walk in space. He died on January 27, 1967, alongside astronauts Virgil "Gus" Grissom and Roger B. Chaffee in a fire during pre-launch testing for Apollo 1 at Cape Canaveral, Florida. He was awarded the NASA Distinguished Service Medal for his flight in Gemini 4 and was then awarded the Congressional Space Medal of Honor posthumously.



June 3, 1969: While on NATO exercises in the South China Sea just off the coast of Vietnam, the Australian aircraft carrier HMAS Melbourne slices the smaller U.S. destroyer USS Frank E. Evans in half, killing 74 of the destroyer's crew. The Captains of both ships were court-martialed, and blame was equally applied.

June 9, 1934: Donald Duck makes his first film appearance in 'The Wise Little Hen', as a supporting character in this cartoon by Walt Disney.

June 11, 2009: The World Health Organization declares H1N1 influenza strain, commonly referred to as "swine flu", as a global pandemic.



June 13, 1966: Chief Justice Earl Warren delivers The Supreme Court landmark Miranda vs. Arizona decision, "that criminal suspects must be informed of their right to consult with an attorney and of their right against self-incrimination prior to questioning by police".

June 14, 1775: The first U.S. Military service, the Continental Army consisting of six companies of riflemen, was established by the Second Continental Congress. The next day, George Washington was appointed by a unanimous vote to command the army.

June 17, 1885: The Statue of Liberty arrives in New York City.

June 18, 1983: Dr. Sally Ride, a 32-year-old physicist and pilot, became the first American woman in space, beginning a six-day mission aboard the space shuttle Challenger, launched from Cape Canaveral, Florida.

June 19, 1910: Father's Day was celebrated for the first time, in Spokane, Washington.

June 20, 1893: A jury in New Bedford, Mass., found Lizzie Borden innocent of the ax murders of her father and stepmother. But was she?

June 20, 1782: The U.S. Congress officially adopted the Great Seal of the United States of America.

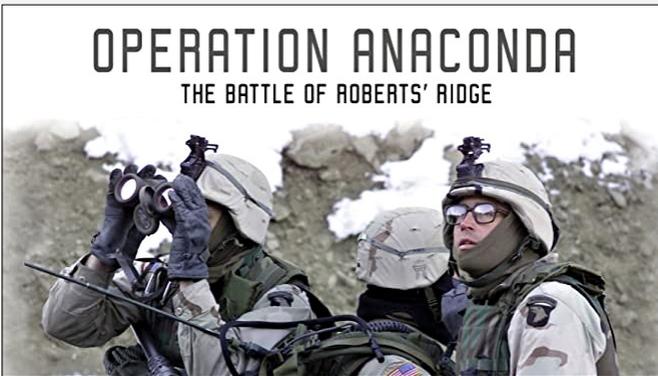
June 25, 1876: Six hundred men of The U.S. Seventh Cavalry led by George Armstrong Custer, were attacked by 3,000 native American Indians consisting mostly of Sioux and Cheyenne led by Crazy Horse. Within an hour of the attack every last one of the soldiers were dead.

June 28, 1919: The signing of the Treaty of Versailles formally ended World War I.

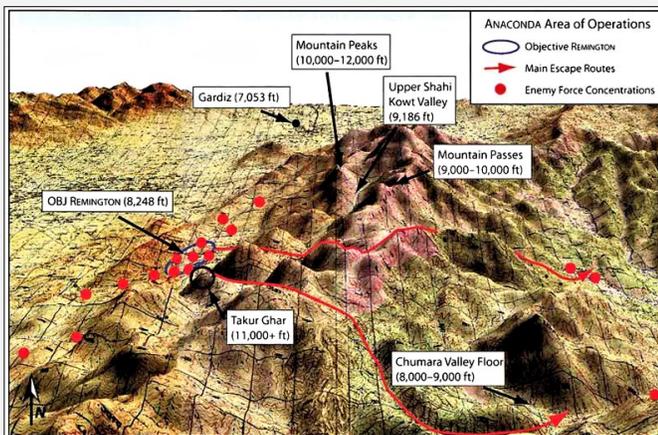
June 30, 1971: Three Soviet cosmonauts who had spent 23 days orbiting the earth began reentry procedures and when they fired the explosive bolts to separate the Soyuz 11, a critical valve was jerked open and the capsule was suddenly exposed to the nearly pressure-less environment of space. Within seconds, the cosmonauts were dead.

***Rolling Thunder®*, Inc. Florida Chapter 1 is a not-for-profit 501 (c) (4) organization, and everyone donates his or her time because they believe in the POW*MIA Issue.**

FEATURED STORY - THE BATTLE AT TAKUR GHAR



On March 2, 2002, Operation Anaconda, the largest set piece battle in Operation Enduring Freedom-Afghanistan (OEF-A), was launched. Its objective was the destruction of the Taliban and al Qaeda terrorist bands that had taken refuge in the Shah-i-Kot Valley in Paktia province, Afghanistan, near the Pakistan border.



Strategic map for U.S. Army Operation Anaconda. The area outlined in blue is the Shah-i-Kot Valley, about 100 hundred miles south of Kabul, Afghanistan, near the Pakistani border

The Shah-i-Kot (Place of the King) has historically been a guerrilla haven and bastion. A small valley with a base elevation of 7,500 feet and limited access, the mountain ridges that border it contain countless caves, crevasses, and other natural features that make it a defender's dream and an attacker's nightmare. Twice in the Soviet-Afghan War of the 1980s, the Red Army launched major offensives against the mujahedeen hiding there. Both times Soviet troops were driven out in defeat.

U.S. Maj. Gen. Franklin Hagenbeck, commander of Task Force Mountain, who oversaw

the operation, orders two SEAL teams inserted – one on a high ridge on the north side of the valley and another at Takur Ghar (High Mountain), a mountain on the valley's southeast border, where they would set up observation posts, identify enemy positions and movement, and direct air strikes. The mission inserting the SEAL team at Takur Ghar resulted in the bloodiest action of the operation: the Battle of Roberts Ridge.

In the evening of March 3, 2002, the Task Force 11 leadership essentially ordered the Delta Force Advanced Force Operations (AFO) commander to pass control of the AFO teams involved in Operation Anaconda to the SEALs of Task Force Blue—who were moving teams in from Bagram to Gardez for this purpose. The SEALs were not heavily involved in the Operation up to this point but the TF11 commander bluntly ordered their deployment as well as changing the immediate command in an ongoing operation, possibly so that the SEALs could gain combat experience?

Later that evening, two SEAL teams from DEVGRU, MAKO 30 & MAKO 21, led by Lieutenant Commander Vic Hyder (MAKO 21) and Senior Chief Special Warfare Operator Britt K. Slabinski (MAKO 30), were to arrive in Gardez for immediate insertion into the Shahi-Kot Valley. MAKO 21 planned to link up with AFO team Juliet at the northern end of the valley, resupply it and then establish a hide site/observation post on the eastern ridge. Meanwhile, MAKO 30 planned to establish an observation point on the peak of Takur Ghar, which commanded a view of the Shahi-Kot valley. Due to time constraints, a helicopter insertion would be needed for the team to reach the peak before dawn. The AFO suggested insertion at a point 1,400 meters (4,300 ft) east of the peak, but due to a delayed B-52 bomber sortie in the area, the team was told to turn back and land at the airstrip near Gardez. Further complications arose during the second lift off as they were delayed due to an air assault in proximity of the LZ.

The two teams were finally picked up at 11:23 PM March 3rd by two MH-47 Chinook helicopters of the 160th Special Operations Aviation Regiment, Razor 03 and Razor 04. However, Razor 03 experienced engine problems and two new MH-

FEATURED STORY *(continued)*

47s were dispatched to replace the original helicopters. This delay meant that the SEAL's could not be inserted into the landing zone east of the peak until 2:30 AM on March 4th, with not enough time to reach the peak before daylight.

An AC-130H Spectre, (Nail 22), flew a reconnaissance mission over the peak prior to the landing and saw no enemy activity, but it was called away to support other troops before Razor 03 and 04 arrived at the landing zone; MAKO 30 team leader was uneasy at the speed with which the sweep was conducted and wondered whether they had the right mountain but he dismissed his doubts and trusted the Spectre's technology.

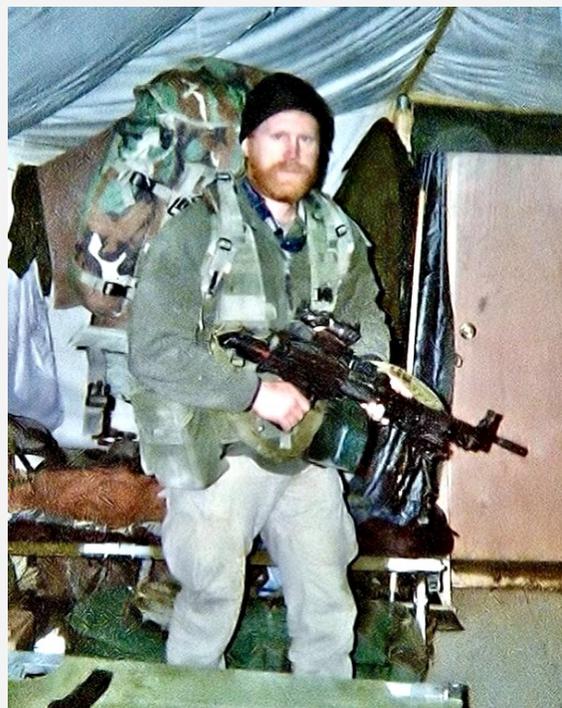
Around 2:45 AM, as Razor 03 prepared to land at the LZ, they were immediately fired upon by machineguns and RPGs. One RPG struck just behind the cockpit, starting a fire in the cabin. As machinegun rounds penetrated the unarmored Chinook, another RPG, seconds after the first, hit the Chinooks right-side radar pod, which blew out all electrical power to the helicopter, particularly its miniguns, navigational systems, and locked the exit ramp in the down position. The Chinook was hit by a further 2 RPGs and more heavy automatic weapons fire from at least three distinct firing points, one of them a DShk (ДШК), which is a Soviet heavy machinegun firing a 12.7×108mm cartridge.

The Chinook set down in a slight depression, shielding the pilots from the DShk. The pilot, Chief Warrant Officer Alan Mack, made the call to take the stricken helicopter off; as he brought the Chinook back into the air, PO1 Neil C. Roberts slipped and fell out of the open ramp. SOAR crew chief Sgt. Dan Madden grabbed hold of his pack but lost his grip. Roberts fell about 10 feet into the snow covering Takur Ghar and activated his infrared strobe to mark his position.

Razor 03 attempted to return and retrieve him, but the damage prevented proper control and the helicopter was forced to make an emergency landing in the valley about 7 miles away. Combat controller USAF SGT Chapman calls in air support for the fallen craft and directs an airship to search the peak of Takur Ghar for Roberts.

Slabinski's intentions were to return to the

of



top

Special Operator First Class Neil Roberts

Takur Ghar by foot to rescue Roberts, but he realizes they are too far from the peak to have any chance of saving Roberts. Further, Chapman's transmission to the airship is not fully understood, and leads to the false impression that there are friendly troops on the peak. Fearing a friendly-fire incident, the nearby gunship is ordered not to provide support for Mako 30. Meanwhile, Roberts, who was fighting the enemy on the peak by himself, was wounded and captured, then killed by his captors. Unaware that Roberts is dead, Mako 30 returns to the peak of Takur Ghar in a second helicopter, Razor 04, piloted by Chief Warrant Officer Jason Friel.

As the Chinook offloaded MAKO 30, they came under immediate fire from the DShK. The helicopter was relatively unscathed and left the AO after MAKO 30 successfully disembarked.

At first, the insurgents didn't spot MAKO 30 in the early morning darkness. They split up into two-man pairs to conduct bounding movements, making good ground until the enemy spotted them. One team, Chapman and Slabinski came across a concealed al-Qaeda bunker and killed 3 fighters before being suppressed by other fighters with PKM machineguns. Chapman and two other SEAL's were

FEATURED STORY - THE BATTLE AT TAKUR GHAR

wounded during the 20 minutes firefight, before team leader Slabinski decided to break contact, and requested assistance from the Army Rangers Quick-Reaction Team of the 1st Battalion Rangers located at Bagram Air Base, led by Captain Nate Self.

At this point, Chapman was mistakenly believed to have been killed prior to Mako 30 withdrawing from the peak. But he wasn't dead. Now alone and wounded twice in the torso, Chapman manages to crawl into the bunker that he and Slabinski had previously cleared, and fatally shoots an enemy fighter rushing toward him. Another enemy insurgent crawls to the bunker's edge and Chapman kills him in hand-to-hand combat.



USAF Combat Controller John Chapman

Around the same time, a helicopter carrying nine members of a 19-man Ranger Quick Reaction Force approaches the mountain. Chapman leaves the bunker and rises to better provide cover fire and is fatally shot. In all, Chapman sustained nine wounds, seven of which were nonfatal, according to his autopsy report. A medical examiner concluded he lived and fought through gunshot wounds to his thigh, heel, calf and torso, which pierced his liver. The final fatal shots likely came from a PKM machine gun, officials said.

The Rangers' helicopter is now taking fire from RPG, DShK and small arms fire, and the right door minigunner, Sergeant Philip Svitak, was killed. The helicopter pilots, Chief Warrant Officers Greg



MH-47 Chinook "Razor 03"

Calvert and Chuck Gant, were seriously wounded by the small arms fire. Then an RPG hit the helicopter, destroying the right engine and forcing it to crash land. As the Rangers and special tactics team exited the aircraft, Private First Class Matt Commons, Sergeant Brad Crose, and Specialist Marc Anderson were killed (Anderson was shot and killed inside the helicopter while Commons and Crose were gunned down on the helicopter ramp). The surviving crew and quick-reaction force took cover in a hillock and a fierce firefight began.

The remaining 10 members of the Rangers Quick Reaction Force and one SEAL Team 6 member leaves Gardez and are dropped off by a separate helicopter at an offset landing site 2,600 feet east of the peak. The SEAL goes to help the surviving members of Mako 30 who are on the mountain but away from the fighting. The Rangers begin traveling to the peak of the mountain.

They were exhausted and the enemy at the top of the hill were just about 50 meters from their position. Meanwhile, the Rangers on the peak called in several Danger Close gun runs from orbiting F-15E and F-16C aircraft to suppress the enemy before again attempting another ground assault. The Ranger commander realized his force was up against an enemy in a fortified bunker, so he called in an air strike from a MQ-1 Predator UAV (which was the first recorded use of the vehicle). One of the two Hellfire missiles it fired collapsed the bunker. As the ten men of the QRF arrived, they prepared to assault the enemy positions. A total of 14 Rangers stormed

FEATURED STORY *(continued)*

the hill as quickly as they could in the knee-deep snow – shooting and throwing grenades. Within minutes, the Rangers took the hill, killing several al Qaeda fighters.

However, an enemy counterattack midday mortally wounded Senior Airman Jason D. Cunningham, a pararescueman who died seven hours after being hit, because the wounded were refused medical evacuation during the daylight hours, due to the risk of another downed helicopter.

At around 20:00 hours, the quick-reaction force and Mako 30/21 were exfiltrated from the Takur Ghar peak.



Takur Ghar - the peak finally secured

It is not known for certain whether Roberts died immediately or was killed by opposing fighters. There is a possibility that he was captured by the al Qaeda fighters after being shot in the right leg, and executed later with a single shot to the back of the head.

Major General Frank Hagenbeck did confirm that al Qaeda fighters were seen (on live video feed from a Predator drone orbiting the firefight) chasing Roberts, and later dragging his body away from the spot where he fell. Another feed from the same Predator showed a puff of heat [from a rifle] and the indistinct figure in front of it fall forward. Also, the quick-reaction soldiers reported fighters wearing Roberts' gear and finding "a helmet with a bullet hole in it, making it clear the last person [Roberts] to wear it had been shot in the head". Other reports have Roberts surviving for nearly an hour and inflicting serious casualties on opposing forces with his pistol and grenades before his death.



Captain Nate Self kneels at the Roberts Ridge Memorial three days after the battle. Photo taken at Bagram Airfield, courtesy of Eric Stebner.

*Navy SEAL Petty Officer 1st Class Neil "Fifi" C. Roberts
Air Force Combat Controller Tech. Sgt John A. Chapman
Air Force Pararescueman Senior Airman Jason D.
Cunningham*

*160th Special Operations Aviation Regiment (SOAR)
Sergeant Philip "Spytech" Svitak*

*75th Ranger Regiment Corporal Matthew A. Commons,
Sergeant Bradley S. Crose, Specialist Marc A. Anderson*

Predator drone footage also shows the possibility that Chapman was alive and fighting on the peak after the SEAL's left rather than being killed outright as thought by MAKO 30. A man was seen fighting in a bunker against multiple enemies until hit by an RPG. If this man was Chapman, he succumbed to a single gunshot wound to the heart "just a mere 45 seconds before Razor 01 appeared over the mountaintop".

For their actions on Takur Ghar, Chapman, Cunningham, and Technical Sergeant Keary J. Miller were awarded the Air Force Cross, the second highest award for bravery. Electronics Technician Second Class Brett Morganti was awarded the Navy Cross.

In 2018, both Chapman and Slabinski were awarded the highest and most prestigious personal military decoration in the US - the Medal of Honor.

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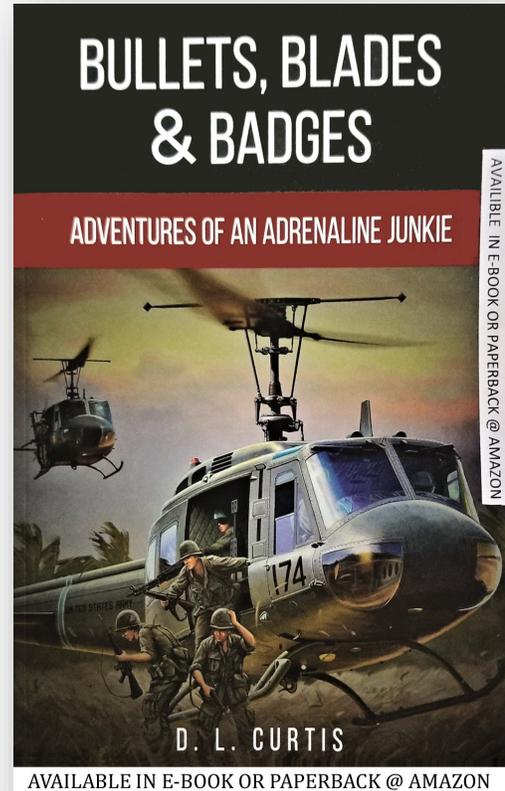
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