



**“CHAPMAN’S LEGACY”**  
United States Air Force  
by Lieutenant Colonel Warren F. Neary, 2018



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In conjunction with Operation Anaconda in March 2002, small reconnaissance teams were tasked to establish observation posts at strategic locations in Afghanistan, and when able, direct U.S. air power to destroy enemy targets. The mountain of Takur Ghar was an ideal spot for such an observation post, with excellent visibility to key locations. For Sergeant Chapman and his joint special operations teammates, the mission on the night of March 3 was to establish a reconnaissance position on Takur Ghar and report al Qaeda movement in the Sahi-Kowt area.

During the initial insertion onto Afghanistan’s Takur Ghar mountaintop on March 4, the MH-47 “Chinook” helicopter carrying Sergeant Chapman and the joint special operations reconnaissance team was ambushed. A rocket propelled grenade struck the helicopter and bullets ripped through the fuselage. The blast ripped through the left side of the Chinook, throwing Navy Petty Officer 1st Class Neil Roberts off the ramp of the helicopter and onto the enemy-infested mountaintop below.

The severely damaged aircraft was unable to return for Petty Officer Roberts, and performed a controlled crash landing a few miles from the mountaintop. Thus, began the chain of events that led to unparalleled acts of valor by numerous joint special operations forces, the deaths of seven U.S. servicemen and now, 16 years later, posthumous award of the Medal of Honor to Sergeant Chapman.

Alone, against the elements and separated from his team with enemy personnel closing in, Petty Officer Roberts was in desperate need of support. The remaining joint special operations team members, fully aware of his precarious situation, immediately began planning a daring rescue attempt that included returning to the top of Takur Ghar where they had just taken heavy enemy fire.

As the team returned to Petty Officer Roberts’ last-known position, now on a second MH-47, the entrenched enemy forces immediately engaged the approaching helicopter with heavy fire. Miraculously, the helicopter, although heavily damaged, was able to successfully offload the remaining special operations team members and return to base. Sergeant Chapman, upon exiting the helicopter, immediately charged uphill through the snow with his team toward enemy positions while under heavy fire from three directions. Sergeant Chapman received fire from two enemy personnel in a fortified position. He returned fire, charged the enemy position, and took out the enemy combatants within. Almost immediately, the team began taking machine gun fire from another fortified enemy position only 12 meters away. Sergeant Chapman deliberately moved into the open to engage the new enemy position. As he heroically engaged the enemy, he was struck by a burst of gunfire and became critically injured.

Sergeant Chapman regained his faculties and continued to fight relentlessly despite his severe wounds. He sustained a violent engagement with multiple enemy fighters for over an hour through the arrival of the quick reaction force, before paying the ultimate sacrifice. In performance of these remarkably heroic actions, Sergeant Chapman is credited with saving the lives of his teammates.

The upgrade to Medal of Honor “John was always selfless – it didn’t just emerge on Takur Ghar – he had always been selfless and highly competent, and thank God for all those qualities,” said Col. Rodriguez. “He could have hunkered down in the bunker and waited for the (Quick Reaction Force) and (Combat Search and Rescue) team to come in, but he assessed the situation and selflessly gave his life for them.”

Sergeant Chapman was originally awarded the Air Force Cross for his actions; however, following a review of Air Force Cross and Silver Star recipients directed by then-Secretary of Defense Ash Carter, the Secretary of the Air Force recommended Sergeant Chapman’s Air Force Cross be upgraded to the Medal of Honor.

In accordance with Air Force policy whereby Medal of Honor recipients are automatically promoted one grade on the first day of the month following the award, Sergeant Chapman will be posthumously promoted to the rank of master sergeant on Sept. 1, 2018.

John would have, so I’ll say it for him. Every American who set foot on that mountaintop acted with great courage and selflessness, and deserve all of our praise and admiration for the sacrifices they made,” said Air Force Col. Ken Rodriguez, Sergeant Chapman’s commander at the time

In total, seven service members lost their lives during the Battle of Takur Ghar: Petty Officer 1st Class Neil Roberts – U.S. Navy SEAL  
Technical Sergeant John Chapman – U.S. Air Force combat control  
Senior Airman Jason Cunningham – U.S. Air Force pararescue  
Corporal Matthew Commons – U.S. Army Ranger  
Sergeant Bradley Crose – U.S. Army Ranger  
Specialist Marc Anderson – U.S. Army Ranger  
Sergeant Philip Svitak – U.S. Army 160th Special Operations Aviation Regiment

Although Chapman served exclusively on active duty, Reserve Citizen Airmen from the 919 Special Operations Wing serve in missions around the world. Chapman’s example of selflessness and sacrifice continues to inspire all Airmen.

## AIR FORCE RESERVE

The Air Force Reserve is a combat-ready force, composed of more than 70,000 Reserve Citizen Airmen, stationed locally at over 60 locations throughout the United States and serving globally for every Combatant Command in air, space and cyberspace.

We are a cost efficient and mission-effective force, providing the nation with operational capability, strategic depth and surge capacity, both overseas and here at home. The Air Force Reserve’s wide-ranging operational capability serves the diverse needs of every Combatant Commander, whose requirements are as varied as the geographic and functional areas they support.

Air Force Reserve Command directly supports the homeland with capabilities, including aerial firefighting, aerial spray, and weather reconnaissance, better known as the “Hurricane Hunters.”

Our relationship with other federal agencies, including the National Weather Service and US Forest Service, demonstrates how federal, military and civilian organizations can work together to support the entire nation.

The majority of our Reservists serve alongside our active-duty counterparts in association constructs. Approximately two-thirds of the Air Force’s associations are with the Air Force Reserve. Integrating through associations delivers significant taxpayer value, both in cost savings and improved mission effectiveness,

by sharing aircraft, equipment and facilities with the active duty.

Value is also gained from “Airmen for Life” as the Air Force Reserve retains the experience and training cost of a member’s active duty service. As over 75 percent of our Reserve Citizen Airmen serve part-time, this combat-tested experience stays in a highly cost- efficient force, available whenever the nation calls. Further, the nation benefits from the intrinsic value gained by a member’s civilian experience in a variety of career fields, from pilots and nurses to space and cyberspace professionals.

## AIR FORCE RESERVE MISSION

Provide Combat-Ready Forces to Fly, Fight and Win.

## MISSION SETS

The Air Force Reserve currently performs about 20 percent of the work of the Air Force, including traditional flying missions and other more specialized missions, such as Weather Reconnaissance, Aerial Fire Fighting, Aerial Spray and Personnel Recovery.

## WHERE AIR FORCE RESERVISTS ARE CURRENTLY SERVING OR DEPLOYED

Afghanistan, Bahrain, Djibouti (Horn of Africa), El Salvador, Ethiopia, Germany, Guam, Guantanamo Bay, Honduras, Iraq, Italy, Japan, Niger, Pakistan, Peru, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, South Korea, South Sudan, Spain, Thailand, Turkey and Uganda.



**AIR FORCE  
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