



NATIONAL MUSEUM
OF THE UNITED STATES AIR FORCE®
Wings & Things Guest Lecture Series

Global War on Terror

Chief Master Sgt. Ramon Colon-Lopez, who in 2007 was one of six airmen to be awarded the first Air Force Combat Action Medal, discuss the Global War on Terror from the perspective of a special tactics pararescueman.

Welcome. Couple of things ... I have a pretty thick Puerto Rican accent so if you don't understand something, feel free to go ahead and ask me and I'll be sure to have my wife translate for me. Another thing, this is going to be pretty much the perspective of one man fighting the war on terror, side by side among the best this nation has to offer. You're going to hear some true stories and some stories that are pretty much heard, but you didn't know who performed this particular mission, specifically that airmen had a role in that.

This is pretty much the layout of what we're going to be doing tonight. We're going to be talking about:

- The origins, basically how I came across this particular opportunity to do this great job;
- The training that it took to become one;
- Quick job description for those of you who do not know what pararescue does;
- Current missions and lessons learned there, and this is based on my own experiences and some of my friends;
- Sacrifices and pretty much encapsulate everything that we go through;
- And then, lastly, final perspectives, kind of like "Jerry Springer's Final Thoughts."

So one thing that I will say right now is this presentation contains some graphic images and some truthful accounts of battles. So I'm going to try to go ahead and keep it as real as possible and not water anything down. You guys have got to come to terms with the reality of war and what we're going through right now.

Before we move on any further, I have about a 4-5 minute video clip that goes through pararescue so without further adieu, we'll go ahead and get started with that.

[Shows video clip]

And we're still hiring for all of you guys in the crowd that want a job!

All right, let's talk about origins. How does one become a special operator in the United States military? It's probably one of the toughest duties out there. For me, growing up, I was a free spirit. You know, everything I wanted, I wanted it now and I wanted it two years before I was supposed to be doing it. At two years, I wanted roller skates because my sisters were roller skating. By age four or five, I thought I was Steve Austin and I was leaping from houses and

gladly didn't break any bones. Thanks, Mom, for not medicating me during those times, especially when I was going to the supermarket with her wearing Underoos with a towel wrapped around my neck thinking that I was Superman!

But it takes a special kind of animal to do this kind of job. The more and more I get to know about my friends, the more I know that we're so close yet so far apart when it comes to mentality. Always a dreamer, always wanting something more ... and that is basically what pushed me to do this. This is pretty much what it takes to become one. It's about two years of training and the beginning stepping stone is a Pararescue and Combat Rescue Officer Indoctrination Course at Lackland. They call it indoctrination because it's a kinder and gentler Air Force. What it is is a "selection and a kick in the butt" to see which man will stand standing.

In our class we had 112 candidates that began training. We had a Christmas break. After that week, about 55-60 came back. That's 50 percent gone. By the end of the 12 weeks, we had only 12 that graduated the first 12 weeks. Now throughout the course of the rest of the pipeline, by the time we got down to the end, there were only nine that ended up becoming pararescuemen. That gives you a perspective of pretty much what our washout rates are.

When we got done with the indoctrination course and picked the guys who were going to continue, we used to go to the combat diver course, a Special Forces course in Key West, Florida. Here about three years ago we broke ground on our own program which is phenomenal, which is tailored more for what we do, which is recovery operations on the water and that is now in Panama City, Florida. From there, we go ahead and permanently change the station of all our students to Kirtland Air Force Base, New Mexico, and we start farming them out to all the different schools which include:

- EMT B&P, which is basically an 18-month course that we crunch down to six months, and our guys are some of the best paramedics out there.
- Army Basic Airborne. Basically any dummy can go to that school. You just get on a plane, you strap something on your back, you jump out, you land, and then you do it again. Six times or five times and then you get to go Golden.
- Then we go to Military Freefall, which is a little bit more technical. There they bring you to a plane, you go up, you jump, but you have to open your own parachute this time. It is a lot more technical because this is precision parachuting, how to basically just navigate for miles, being able to get from point A to point B.
- You also go to Survival Training. Mostly every single air commander in the Air Force goes to this particular training, but we go through some other steps after that one on how to survive and how to survive in captivity.
- And lastly, the Pararescue and Combat Rescue Officer Apprentice Course at Kirtland Air Force Base in New Mexico. That is six months where you put all these vehicles together. This is to get from point A to point B, but what do you do when you get there? That's where you actually tie it all together, and you tie it all together to perform this mission.

Twenty-five graduates in 2001. We have 115 grads last year, and that is basically after September 11, we had a spike. Our young men ended up signing up because they wanted to do their duty and Jeff spoke about the anger after 9/11, and a lot of us felt that. I was serving at the

time. I was in Virginia Beach when the planes struck the Twin Towers and I'd just gotten back from Iran. We'll go through that process to let you know exactly how things panned out after that particular day and incident.

This is the mission of a pararescueman. In a nut shell, and you guys can read the slide, but its rescue any time, any where. Why do we need rescue? Because bad things happen. We're asking people to put themselves in harm's way – from the soldier, to the airman, to the sailor, in every single environment. We have trees, we have mountains, we have sand, we have water, we have snow, and we have to be proficient in every single environment because when things go wrong, we are the 911 call that goes in response to those things.

And why so fit? Why do we have to be physically fit? Even now as a chief right now, I have to keep up with my 19 and 21 year olds, which most of them can't keep up with me anyways, but that's the nature of the beast. But, reason being is because when you put yourself in harm's way to get somebody out of trouble, what are the chances that they're able to walk out with you ... pretty slim to none. Chances are you're going to have to carry somebody. Not only that, but you have to carry all this equipment. And what I have here is just personal equipment. This is personal sustainment. It doesn't include any of the rescue equipment that we have to put on in addition to that.

You saw the last man on the video with all the parachuting equipment with the oxygen mask. That's about 130 pounds of equipment altogether, including the parachute and everything. So a guy like me that weighs about a buck fifty, that's doubling my weight. Now you get some of these other beefcakes that we have in the career field that are 6'4" and 240 pounds, its like carrying a fanny pack. But to make it look cool, we'll say that the equipment is on me. What you have here is an assortment of weapons. Right now we have a carbon side arm for close quarter battle, medical equipment to include narcotics and a small surgical kit to be able to do surgical procedures down range, 40 mike mike five five six Belgian grenades, low bearing equipment with survival, helmets and so on, so on. So you see, pretty much, you saw the first picture in the origin slide where I have Don Quixote and then on the overview I had the jack-of-all-trades, and that is because we have to be able to react to every single environment.

Every single society has had such special wars, pretty much the men that people call upon when nobody else wants to do the deed. They also know that hard times call for hard men, and one specific group here is the Spartans. The reason I used them is because there were 300 of them that held the gates at Thermopylae against millions and millions of Moslems that were trying to overtake their land. And there are only about 300 pararescuemen now today. Notice the crimson ... our maroon berets and their capes go pretty much side by side. Plus, I think if we got into a bar fight with these guys now, we'd win because they're wearing dresses and we just couldn't do that. *[laughter]*

Much like them, society has always needed somebody to call upon when things go horribly wrong. Not only that, but somebody that is willing to sacrifice his own life for somebody else to have a better life, and that's what pararescue is all about – 911 for everyone. It says that at the bottom because even SEALs, Green Berets and Recon Marines need to call 911, and that is true

because we put ourselves in harm's way. We go where nobody else wants to go, and when the best of the best get in trouble, who are they going to call upon? Not Ghostbusters. They call us.

The following slides that I'm going to show you have a couple of graphic pictures. Like I said at the beginning of the lecture, it's basically to make sense and justice for what we're trying to put across here. We have a lot of guys sacrificing so much and, right now, there's guys in the fight out there, getting ready to go ahead and get after it, after the enemy. We do a lot of missions. Most of the public ties us to a helicopter doing search and rescue up and down the hoist. That was true in Southeast Asia. Nowadays we have developed and morphed into these other capabilities because as war evolves, the man has to evolve as well. I like to call us the big Great White Shark. It's almost unchanged, but it always adapts to its environment to make sure it remains up on top.

First one we're going to talk about is Combat Search and Rescue. The same thing we were doing in Southeast Asia is what pararescue's mostly famous for. Combat Search and Rescue ended up flying about 100 sorties in OEF and some in OIF. It was basically covering about a 1,400 man task force, about 700 ground and air assets that were in and out performing missions every night, sometimes two, maybe three missions going on simultaneously, and we were on what they call a 30-minute string. Basically if something happens, you have the blades turning and you go ahead and react to it. A lot of great missions happened out there in Afghanistan, and I was lucky to do this particular job for just one rotation. Most of my rotations were pretty much direct action attached to a SEAL team.

This is one of the most noble things we do. If you look at the tally record, when you look at what CNN, what Fox News, and everything is putting out, people performing these rescues, you can almost guarantee that pararescue is involved in most of them, including this one here that most of you pretty much heard about – the rescue of Jessica Lynch. The picture doesn't lie. That's pararescueman Chris Telsworth, and that flag right there is the flag that she was clenching in her fist when she was brought out of Iraq into Landstuhl, Germany. The press put out that it was the Marines that recovered. Yeah, that is true. There was a smaller group of men that were doing the technical aspects of the mission, and this pararescueman here made sure he got her at ease, packaged her, and made sure he got her to safety. Up to this day, they're friends, and Chris is a great pararescueman and he's actively serving right now in Davis-Monthan, Arizona. He was the one that, when she said, "Hey, I'm an American." He told her, "Hey, I'm an American, too. Just go ahead and hold on to this." She was hysterical and if you go onto YouTube, you can pretty much watch the entire hit. It was a pretty good mission that led us to her based on a Good Samaritan, a good Iraqi lawyer. I never thought I'd say those words ... "good lawyer." *[laughter]* But a good Iraqi lawyer came out and said I have seen this girl, and I think it is somebody you're looking for. She's an American. You guys need to do something about it because most of the other people who had gotten captured with her had been assassinated, killed and buried in a soccer field close by the hospital, which was the ranger's job to go and dig up the bodies which was no easy task because they had been decomposed for quite a while. But we got Jessica back and that was a huge win for the United States and for West Virginia, I guess, since nothing happens down there. *[laughter]*

Let's talk about Direct Action for a little bit. This is pretty much when you put special tactics personnel, combat weather, pararescuemen, combat control and TACPs attached with other services. This is what basically we call a Rainbow Coalition – a lot of services pretty much interacting together. Most of these missions, we're looking for targets, specific targets. Our targets were the top three. If you look at a base hierarchy, you have the wing, group and squadron. We're taking care of the wing and group commanders. Everything below that, was for the conventional forces. This is probably one of the most rewarding missions that we ended up doing out there because it was immediate feedback. When you captured somebody, you got some good intelligence out of them. When you kill somebody, you know there's one less bad guy on the street. And as you can see, part of it is also taking most of their assets away from them. Pretty primitive in nature, but they're pretty advanced when it comes to the thought process in combat because they've been doing it for a long time, a lot longer than I have been on this earth; and yes, I'm 38, just in case, don't let the knowledge frost fool you.

I want to talk about one mission here, specifically, that is part of the Warrior Airmen exhibit, and this is a mission going after a gentleman called Mamunsha. This one particular guy was transporting potassium cyanide back and forth from Pakistan, and we had been tracking him for about 30 days. We got the call, the trigger, to go ahead and get him. Immediately upon filtration into the side, we were landing the 47's into a dry river bed. My helicopter was the first one coming in. When it came in for final, we started hearing all these pings going around, and we pretty much thought it was the small rocks from the dry river bed. Then the flight engineer gets rocked back and the right gunner starts screaming, "Get out! Get out!" He said some other word, but we won't say that word here; it starts with an F and ends with a K). *[laughter]*

He ended up just saying, "Get out!" and we start running out and see missile flashes coming from three different directions. You talk about trying to get small behind river bed rocks, there aren't not many big ones. We had this indigenous force with us and those guys just pretty much scatter around the place, and then there were myself and these two gentlemen right here, just pretty much looking to where the enemy were going, and they were still actively engaging us. The problem here was that we didn't know who else was around that dry river bed. They were waiting for us, and there were three other helicopters coming in. So immediately my buddy right here in the middle, Coop, made the call to go ahead and start chasing these guys, and we were chasing them up the hill, which is pretty much not an advantageous point because they can just dig in and shoot down and then we're toast. But we ended up overrunning them, and then the indigenous forces caught up and started running after us too, so it looked like a lot more dudes were coming after the bad guys. We ended up eliminating the threat. I personally shot two with my weapon. Coop and Mark ended up killing a couple more, and basically we stopped the attack. What we ended up finding out is that they had a cache of RPDs, PKMs and other weapons that they could have potentially gone up that hill and waited for the other helicopters to come in and down one of them. So that changed the tide of that particular battle.

Once we got done with it, they had a whole bunch of materials that they were using for suicide bombs and everything else, and we got some good intel because we ended up capturing Mamunsha's brother. Mamunsha was one of the guys we ended up shooting from the get-go and he was a pretty bad guy. We ended up getting some good information on some follow-on targets that we had. One of those was this particular mission that we ended up doing jointly with the

SAS. On this one we got word that there was a guy selling drugs to go ahead and fund terrorism. This guy was not only selling drugs, but we got intelligence that he was providing documents for people to do cross-border operations, do bad things, and then go back out pretty much scot-free. So he was providing sanctuary for bad guys. When we walked upon this target, the guy had just huge amounts of hashish, and he ended up selling them and then funding terror, and some of the weapons that we saw earlier were some of his. As a show of force, we normally went ahead and put explosives in the cache to destroy the weapons and then we destroyed some of the product, some of the other stuff we confiscated.

We had been up probably for about 36 hours at this point, and we were taking speed, taking amphetamines that they call “gold pills” just to be able to press on with the mission at the time. We started burning this hashish and I got the bright idea, “Hey, Coop, go ahead and take a picture. This is kinda cool, man ... a bunch of drugs and I’ve got these indigenous guys. Yeah, this’ll be something to put in the album.” The camera died so Coop went back to get another battery, so in the meantime we’re standing next to this and if you can see the way the smoke is just actually flowing. *[laughter]* So we ended up standing there, Coop comes back with the second camera, he snaps the pictures and everything else, and by then it’s just, all right *[laughter]* What else do we need to do, where we goin’? It was a five hour ride back to the base, and I swear to God, guys, that I understood this man. They were speaking Pash to us and I’m like, “Yeah, right on, man, I get you!” I ate about five MREs on the travel back, and they had to sign a statement that I was exposed to this stuff. So, lesson learned here, don’t stand too close to a pile of burning hashish, especially raw product.

Then Surveillance and Reconnaissance ... Another lesson learned was that the enemy was pretty smart about conventional tactics. We started out doing the direct action missions infiltrating by helicopter. One problem: Most of the valleys there are in bowls and you have to go through mountain passes to get to them. When the helicopters were about seven miles from target, the sound just travels so fast through those canyons that they heard the helicopters coming. By the time we got to the villages, it was what we call a “dry hole.” There was nobody there. So we started using this nifty thing called UAVs. All right so we’ve been hitting dry hole after dry hole so let’s see what’s going on here. We ended up employing the UAVs, and we sent up dummy runs of helicopters, resupplies and we’ll film what happened, what’s going on? So, no kidding, about seven minutes out, people are disbursing like roaches out of the villages. We’re like, hmm, okay. So they’re hearing us right around this time, blah blah blah, so we had the intel guys with the 20-pound brains out there, so “Based on my calculations” ... Whatever dude, how long does it take for them to hear this helicopter? They’re like, mmm, you’ve gotta be about seven miles out. All right, cool.

So we started thinking outside the box and you’re going to see a lot of pictures with beards and everything else. We had to outsmart them just like General Olds used to do back in the days, like putting Communist stars on his aircraft and everything else just to get a little bit of advantage because the enemy was getting too good. Now we’re fighting them in their own backyard. So by looking like them, it will give us some means of infiltration, especially a little guy like me – skinny, brown, with a big beard, you know. I fit in perfect. So we used to go ahead and get in a taxi cab with another interpreter and drive through the village. When the helicopters were coming around, okay, they’re running that direction, that direction, that

direction. All right, check. Take notes. When the real hit will come, we'll have forces in place all around the village.

Now we'll send the helicopters in. Guys starting running out – like a bad episode of Cops -- people getting tackled, people getting captured. We ended up getting a lot of good guys ... well, good bad guys, high volley targets that way. The key thing is, we didn't have to kill them. We're capturing them alive, which was leading us to some other men that we were looking for. That was one of the successes there of the mission.

This is once again my happy face in Afghanistan after being up for like 36 hours.

How many of you guys have seen the Warrior Airmen display here at the museum? That is that Cheshire cat that is in that display right there. And if you look at the belly of that Cheshire cat, it was dipped in blood a couple of times for numerous reasons and I'll go ahead and touch upon that at the end when we talk about it. And you're also going to notice that a lot of the men had New York Fire Department and Police Department patches on their uniforms. That was our tribute to them based on the 9/11 events.

When we first went into the war, everyone was angry, guys. Everybody had anger, just like you had anger when you were sitting back here. How dare they? How dare they hit us on our own turf? Well, we got the opportunity to go forward to their turf and go ahead and deal some ass whippings because they deserved them. We did it pretty good at first. And we came to realize a lot of things too. That there is good and bad in everywhere you go, and we got to see it firsthand. Some of the villagers: the good, the bad, and the ugly – which was mostly us.

This particular mission here ... we got infiltrated and I've gotta check my records but I'm almost sure that 357 was one of the helicopters that brought us into that mission. That is the big 53 that is over there by the Warrior Airmen display. What we ended up doing was loading some ATVs and our mission was to travel 120 miles in three days through the middle of the desert, no man's land, and re-survey three desert landing zones for C-17s to be able to put men in the dirt and get these forward staging bases going.

On this particular mission, we got in-filled (this is shortly after we got in-fill). We got our equipment together and everything else, dust-proofed the weapons and pretty much made sure everyone was good to go. It was self-sustained. We had food, water and ideas on how to do this. Halfway through the trek, we ended up running upon this – that is a camel. That is an animal that is designed to survive in the desert and that poor SOB just gave up. So all of us are here just wondering, like, that camel gave up – what the hell are we doing standing next to it? Not only that, but just when you thought you were in the middle of nowhere, this guy will show up on a bicycle with an AK! It's like the Afghan version of Peewee's Big Adventure, you know. *[laughter]* So of course, we don't know if this guy's a bad guy who's collecting intel, so we were all taking pictures of him. This particular guy right here, he didn't look ... would you trust this savory character? I wouldn't, you know. That's why you see my gun pointed at his foot. I'm like if he pulls that AK out, I'm shooting him! So we ended up just taking it back, making sure he didn't check out with any of the other pictures.

This picture here was three-quarters into the mission. We ended up rolling up in the very first airfield that was assaulted in Afghanistan. That was Objective Rhino. That's the one that most of you saw on CNN, the NVG video of guys parachuting into Afghanistan. We went back and there's a pretty big camp, a lot of structures, and there was a runway right in there. It was supposed to be isolated. We got intel the day before saying that there's nobody there, no Afghan military, blah blah blah, so we're like, all right, cool.

So we're traveling, probably around 3 o'clock in the afternoon, daytime, you know, no one likes to approach buildings in the night time because we had the advantage with the NVGs and everything else. But we ended up deciding since it was supposed to be isolated, let's go ahead and check it out. So as we approach, we gain a little bit of high ground and we saw some movement within the compound. We're like, okay, that's not really good. This is supposed to be isolated and we're looking for markings, you know, uniforms, things of that nature, making sure that we're running into insurgents.

We decided to send two scouts out to get a little bit closer look and get eyes on them and what was going on. No sooner than those guys ended up hitting some soft dirt and kicked up some dust, there were about four Hi-Lux trucks, that's an equivalent to a Tacoma, a Toyota, with guns mounted on it, packed to the gills. These guys pretty much had mortar rounds, RPGs, and they were coming after us and they had us flanked. We're like, all right, what do we do now? There's 10 of us and there's probably about 40 of them. Combat controller, Duke Danforth, starts calling for close air support; can't get anything on the Net. We're like, wow, we're going to have to fight this out so we made the decision to go ahead and try to get into higher ground and get a good fighting position.

We see that the trucks are getting closer in the sights and we're flanked now so Hans, the team leader, ended up saying all right, dig in right now. We're gonna fight it out. So everybody's just pretty much laying in the middle of the desert. Nothing. if I'm laying down here with my gun pointed that way, the enemy is pretty much all around. So we're like, all, right this is it. This is going to be our Thermopylae; we're going to fight till the end. But it just so happens that one of the flags in the ATVs pops up and they see our American flag. The guys kind of look over and they just get in one of the trucks and start waving the Afghani flag. We're like okay, so what's going on here?

We sent two scouts to go ahead and meet them. We had snipers trained on the guys that were walking towards us and we sent the guys. Then we get the radio call that these guys are for President Karzai and they're good. They want to have us over for lunch. *[laughter]* So we took them up on the offer. We ended up having lunch with them and as soon as they found out I had a medical bag with me, there were about 30 of them lined up with all kinds of nasty toys and things like that. So winning hearts and minds, we go ahead and treat them and everything else. And you know, we gave them medical treatment. They gave us food. They also gave us the runs because it was pretty much what we like to call "chainsaw chicken." It looks like they go ahead and put a bag of chicken, use a chainsaw and make stew out of them. But we were grateful that we didn't get into a firefight with them because that would have been really bad, not definitely a strategic win for the war.

Then low-visibility operations. We talked about the taxi cab. We talked about some of the other things that we needed to do. Once again, it's all about out-smarting the enemy. It was all about how can we get ahead of them, because if you've got those guys in the mountains, they've got a loaf of bread, a bladder of water, flip flops and man-jammies and they just outrun you on the ground for days. They have the vantage point. They have been doing this for decades.

So we ended up just going ahead and altering our plan over and over again and low-visibility was definitely the way to go. The one lesson we learned for me here is to speak up in English as best I could so I didn't get shot in the face with the rest of the other guys that were pretty much hiding in the village. There was always a big American flag or something hanging from my neck because my friends told me, "Dude, you better friggin' say something in the dark because I'm gonna shoot you." But it was a good lesson learned and then just treating the guys that were pretty much giving us intelligence and everything else. But it's unlike any clinic. If you show up at the clinic and your doctor's got a Glock on the side of his head, beware because you may get some treatment that you don't want.

But I always ask, "What in the hell are you doing to this guy, Ray?" He had back problems, people. All right, there's nothing else going on there, and my hand is gloved for a reason.

Then we got some high profile missions. We were the first team to end up covering on President Hamid Karzai's detail. This is shortly ... we took him out of the country at the beginning and then we put him back in power, and he asked for a team of special operators based on the threat that was coming upon him. We ended up moving to this little place across from his palace called the Yellow House. It was basically a gutted place and we ended up moving some cots, MREs, some water and pretty much set up a command post in there to be able to cover his security detail. So basically from the time he woke up to the time he went to bed, we were there with him – escorting him from the palace to the mosque, wherever he travelled. That was another good lesson learned there about the way we were conducting business. We ended up hiring people to go ahead and do the cooking for us because it was going to be intensive. We had about 56 guys out on that particular detail. But a lot of our guys were getting sick. The SEAL commander came up to me and said, "Ray, I want you to look into this because a lot of our guys are getting really sick and they're going down for three to five days at a pop." We're talking about coming out from both ends, just really sick. They couldn't move.

The first place we decided to look was the kitchen. They had a meat grinder there so they didn't chainsaw the chickens. They just put them in the meat grinder there and made them that way. What we saw was a lot of the pots and everything else had maggots and the meat grinder hadn't been cleaned in about a year. So they were feeding us a whole bunch of bad food. So we fired that caterer and ended up getting somebody else and started eating more MREs.

Also on this mission, it was early summer in '02 when he went to one of his brother's weddings up in the vicinity of Kandahar. As we were leaving the wedding, he's a pretty proud man, and he likes to walk everywhere, which makes it harder for us because he's a huge target. There's a lot of people that want him dead. At this particular wedding, he comes out and he pretty much gets out of the car and he starts hugging people and everything else. This little SEAL right there, Pat Fab. That's me right there. Fab is sitting in the rear left; I'm sitting in the rear right; Karzai is

sitting in front with the SEAL commander. As soon as Karzai gets out of the car, Fab sees these guys moving really fast and they're hiding something. So Fab gets out of the car. He comes around the Suburban and sees the guys coming at him and literally drops two guys. Shots were fired so fast. They got off a couple of rounds and the SEAL commander that was driving the vehicle ended up getting a nick to the head. You probably saw his picture in *Newsweek*. He was the guy sitting pretty much on the curb with a T-shirt on his head, bleeding. But President Karzai's life was saved that day and everything happened so fast, that it would make your head spin. We were able to protect him and if we would have failed that particular day, the war would have taken a turn for the worst because the special operators could not even protect the president of the country.

Lesson learned there: Take care of the boss and the boss will take care of you.

And why we need to be "The Great White" of special operations of the military or just pretty much evolve as we know it. It's because of the way they fight. They know their ground, they know what to do, they know how to do it, and they know what hurts. They know when to have patience and hide. This is a pretty lethal enemy, so low tech yet highly effective. They know what they do and this is how they fight.

These are some shots from Roberts Ridge. This is one of the bunkers that we couldn't neutralize because we couldn't see it. Imagine snow covering all of this and then just pretty much having to shoot in between trees and having two primary features right there protecting them from our incoming fire. Look at the trenches. Remember, I told you about that uphill battle. This is probably what we would have encountered if we'd let those guys go a little bit farther. They would have dug in, gunned those RPGs and pretty much made us friggin' gone. That is how they fight and this is one of the guns that ended up killing Chappy and Neal possibly. Look at the structure. You know, shooting downhill, they can move that tripod up anywhere they need to go and you cannot pretty much penetrate that. You know, you saw some of that in Normandy, how everybody was pretty much on high ground, well barricaded, shooting down, and you had to take significant casualties to be able to neutralize the threat.

But, we bring some good fire power, and that's where the Air Force is great – air power, as witnessed here. These are a couple of 500-pound bombs and this is a shot of Torah Bora. I have a friend, Combat Controller Joe O'Keefe, that is still waiting on his check because this is where Bin Laden was hiding in Torah Bora. He spent so much ammunition out there for 72 hours straight, that he swears he killed Bin Laden. He says that is a stunt double. So, he's still waiting for the check. When he retired, his retirement cake was a big check for the money he never got. But, that is pretty amazing all on its own.

These are pictures following Roberts Ridge. Operation Anaconda did not end that day. There were a lot of people that ended up leaving the area that survived the attacks, especially the air strikes following the intense fire fight. A lot of them were Chechens, a lot of them were pretty much Afghan locals facilitating for these foreign fighters to be able to go ahead and do what they did. We found a lot of things. When we found the bodies we knew there was equipment missing. We found some horrific things done to our friends, which pretty much made us angrier. So we wanted to go ahead and get more payback once again. The intelligence kept rolling,

rolling, rolling, and we had just got in country and we had the call for this one particular mission. That mission was to intercept some vehicles heading towards the training site that potentially had some of the survivors of Anaconda.

What you're looking at here is after killing all the enemy, this is John Chapman's helmet and John Chapman's weapon. By serial number, they had it. In addition, this is his NVG catcher's mask right there. Also, this is Neal Robert's sniper rifle and his fire department watch cap. See, Neal had written September 11, 2001, on the butt stock of his rifle. So they ended up getting that from him, and also his LB and some other equipment that he was carrying.

Not only that, but this bastard right here had the nerve to, after Neal was shot and killed and pretty much all the atrocities were done to him, he stole Neal's jacket. That's a Mountain Howard jacket and it had Neal's initials on it. So not only did we take the jacket back, we ended up dropping a couple more bombs to make that place just totally disappear – out of anger and out of payback because our boys back needed some good news.

There's no place like home. Part of that is because of the environment we're put in and the time that we spend away from home. We end up spending on the average between 200 and 300 days out of the year away from our loved ones, and this is pretty much the environment that we live in. It pretty much looks like a refugee camp. This is kinda like Tony Montana and friggin' Freedom Town in *Scarface* right there. But, you're talking dust, you're talking insects, you're talking bad nutrition, worse weather. It gets too cold, it gets too warm. You have to go to 10,000 feet. You have to work in the battle with mosquitoes. You have malaria; you have to take all these pills to go along with it. It takes a toll on the body.

Going back to the physical fitness aspect of things, that's one of the other key reasons. We don't just do it to remain fit. We do it because we have to, because of the nature of the things we have to survive, the things that we have to endure. Afghanistan is probably one of the toughest terrains that I have ever worked on, just because it can go from jungle to desert, desert to high mountaineering scenarios. We do all these things because we know that somebody's got to do this job, because if we don't do it, the possibility that somebody will strike in our country, on our own soil is there. That's when we fight the war we think. It's pretty much – we go through a lot.

I recently found out there's an article in *Men's Journal*, which I have the article right in there, "What the War Did to Andy" it is called. Andy Kubik is a good friend of mine, combat controller, Silver Star recipient in Afghanistan and Bronze Star with Valor in Bosnia. Andy got put in a lot of bad situations and he did so honorably and fought valiantly and ended up coming up on top – until he returned home. When he got home, he got extremely paranoid, started hitting the bottle, started hitting pills and was basically let go of the service. So he goes to Michigan and starts committing crimes, just because he needs that adrenalin, he needs to do something that puts him in danger. Long story short, Andy's now in a VA hospital going through some treatment for substance abuse and PTSD.

So how does a war go from top performer to that? How do we deal when our friends die in helicopter crashes? How do we feel when I get to come home and kiss Janet and my friend is

dead in Afghanistan and I have the widow standing there weeping next to us? How do we deal, looking at the locker next to you in the team room and knowing that Scott Sather's never going to come back? How do you deal with the people that you couldn't save? When I couldn't save a life and that's what I'm assigned to do, that's what you pay me to do, to bring people back home and I couldn't save them. How could I deal with the people I have killed, the people I've put bullets into, those that warranted it and those you have questions about? That is exactly the struggle.

I'll tell you it's not easy, and demons will catch up with all of us at some point. They got a hold of Andy, and Andy didn't have family support. His wife left him and his kid pretty much went with the wife. But the one thing that I personally have is sitting right here in the front row, and that is the support I have gotten from Janet and my family. Janet, herself, had to put up with when Ray was doing surveillance and reconnaissance missions, sleeping in a half sleeping bag, up to here with a big puffy jacket in snow, just getting about two hours of sleep at a time to make sure nobody had walked up on us and pretty much surprise us because it would be pretty much embarrassing to be found dead on CNN with a half sleeping bag that looks like a sack race, and they'd say what the hell's a special operations guy doing up there getting shot after a sack race?

We ended up doing a lot of different things, and I would come home and we'd have this nice king Tempurpedic bed. And I'd come home all smelly because we'd been eating the food, had the long beard, probably had chainsaw chicken stuck in it still, and she'll be like, you need to shower, you need to go ahead and shave that thing and come to bed. So as I'm sleeping – this is after, you know *[laughter]* – she has this bed three-quarters to herself and I'm still sleeping like a mummy. Not only that, but any minor knows I will stand up – pop up like a jack-in-the-box. She could deal with that. The one thing that got her was the one eyeball open. That was freaking her out. She's like, you know that eye thing, you gotta stop it or otherwise you're going to the couch! So we ended up doing that.

My point is that a sense of humor has carried me through a lot of this and continues to do because very few things in life I take serious. Combat is one of them. You have seen the face, and then you have seen the face. There's two different guys and Janet calls it "The Switch." When I'm in combat, I turn into a totally different person. When I come home, I have to flick that switch. Not only because of my combat mentality, but also because she's been running the house and if I try to change anything that she's done, I'm telling you, the Taliban's got nothing on my baby! She scares me!

This particular guy right here, that is my helmet. This is my helmet. And if you look at mine, it looks like a Kevlar yamaka on top of his head because this guy's probably about like 6'5", about 260 pounds and then there's little ole me. We had to special order his helmet because the Air Force didn't have his size. That's how big this animal's head is. So I put it on, and I looked like one of those Mario Brothers characters in there or *Space Balls* for that matter.

Then the last thing I want to talk about on this slide is about our buddies that make it back but they're not the same any more – Chad Gheskie. Jack here recently got injured in a parachuting accident to where he's a quadriplegic right now. Low visibility, no markings on the landings,

pretty much came in too hard with all his equipment on, 100 pounds plus of equipment, broke his neck upon landing. We're following his recovery right now, but these are good friends that don't get to be coming to us like they were before. But one thing that doesn't change: they're still our family. Their families are our families and we really embrace every single one of them. Jack will never be out of our scope. He's moving to Dallas on April 6 and I'm pretty sure the guys are going to be riding their Harleys up there because he's a big Harley rider, to go and visit him every so often, just like we do with Chad Gheskie. Not only us, but the wives participate on this. There is no wife up there that has lost her husband or lost some capacity of her husband that doesn't have 20 more wanting to take care of her and make sure she's got everything she needs. That is the true essence of special operations family. Just like the Spartans. Remember, I talked about them earlier. It was a tight community where a man can look at his woman and she can pretty much put a sword into somebody's gut if she felt they were disrespecting the family. And she's probably got about three swords and a gun in her purse or something. *[laughter]*

And then there's those who wait for us. I talked a lot about Janet because I mean she's my saving grace. She listens. She's pretty much there for me all the time and never once has she complained. The only time that I have ever come home from combat is when her mom, Sally, was about to pass away, and that was the time she said, "Ray, it's time." And those were good enough words to where I found my way home and I was able to be there for Sally, for Janet and Bill before she passed on. Outside of that, she's fully supportive. She's always there and she's just wanting to see which one of our guys is going to be pretty much be the one coming home victorious and which one is going to be telling the best stories.

My family, right here, mom and dad ... This is the woman that put up with the Underoos kid. This is the man that pretty much told her to whack me because he wouldn't whack me when I was a kid. He delegated the ass-whippings to mom ... isn't that great? Talk about psy-ops. That is the good one – mom is pretty much the one that hands it over. One time I had a rubber band with a lollipop stick and dad had told me to go. He didn't want me watching TV with him – Rat Patrol, what have you – and I had a clear view of him – this is the beginning of my sniper training – and I'm like, man, you didn't watch me. The thing misfired and I hit him right on the back of the ear. I didn't come out of the room for about 24 hours.

But this is something to look forward to. This is what keeps us going, day by day. The biggest lesson learned here: It wasn't anger. That's not why I wanted to fight because a true warrior fights not because he hates what's in front of him, but because he loves what's left behind ... not only them sitting there in the front row, but all of you, the people that support us day in and day out.

And then there's those that who can never come back: John Chapman, Scott Sather, Scott Duffman, Adam Brown recently – a SEAL killed last week, Neal Roberts, Jason Cunningham, Dusty Markham. Those are all close friends that have passed on, that have died at the hands of the enemy. But they wouldn't have it any other way. Spartans always talked about dying a beautiful death. We fight to fight an honorable death. If I'm gonna go, I want to go doing what I do best, as I'm pretty sure all these men have pretty much thought about before they went out. A lot of us write letters that come out once we're gone to explain the reason of why we're content with what we did. We accept it every day. Every day we accept when we put on our trousers and

we go to work, it may be our last, whether it's training, whether it's combat. Anything can happen, but we accept that because that's what we signed up to do. That's what's special about special operations – just coming to terms with what you're willing to do and how much you're willing to sacrifice. And I know my wife is willing to sacrifice it all with me. She won't like it when I'm gone, but she'll know I died doing what I love to do.

Before I go ahead and say some closing words here, I want to say that I love every single one of these men like they were my brothers. Even though they cannot be here with us, they are, because every time we step into the fight now, they're not fighting just Ray Colon-Lopez. They're fighting all seven of those guys that I mentioned with me, within me, because we carry them with us. Their memory lives and we have memorials. We have streets named after them. We have museum exhibits for them and we just never ever, ever, ever let go because that is all something that fuels the fire within, dealing with those demons that I spoke about. It's everything that's been sacrificed so far for you not to be able to succeed in this particular mission. That is the essence of special operations work.