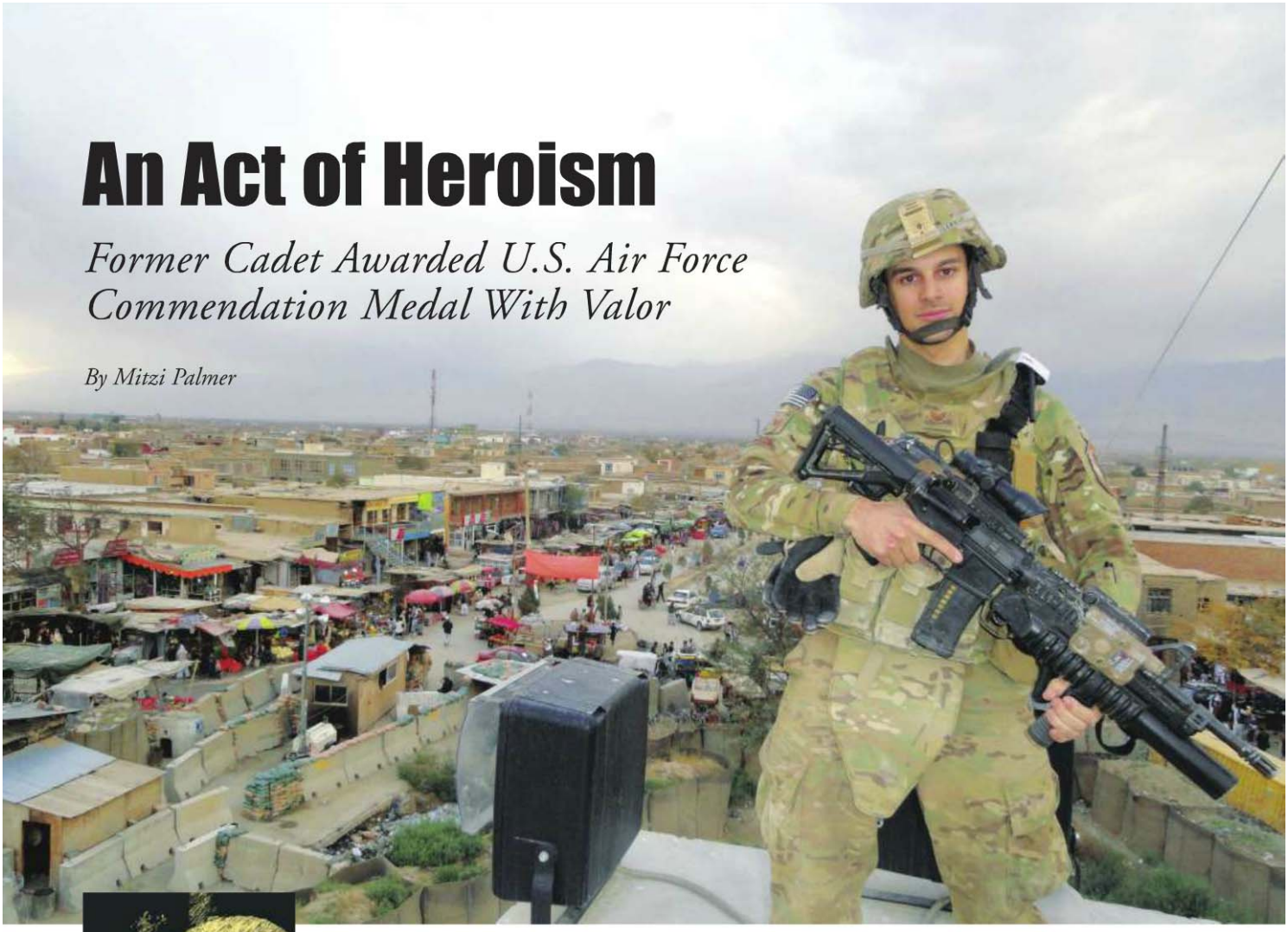
An Act of Heroism

Former Cadet Awarded U.S. Air Force Commendation Medal With Valor

By Mitzi Palmer





U.S. Air Force Staff Sgt. Samuel Lerman served in Afghanistan for 6½ months from 2011-2012 as a response force leader in the 459th Security Forces Squadron. He helped guard one of two major control points in Afghanistan at the time.

On Sept. 10, 2011 — the day before the 10th anniversary of the terrorist attacks against the U.S. — Air Force Staff Sgt. Samuel Lerman was working his regular 14-hour night shift at Bagram Air Field in Afghanistan when an insurgent rocket attack on the airfield occurred.

Two Afghan contractors died and nine individuals were injured. But because of the quick response of Lerman and his fellow Air Force Security Forces members, many lives were saved.

Lerman's acts of courage that night were formally recognized recently when U.S. Air Forces Central Commander Lt. Gen. John W. Hesterman III awarded him the Air Force Commendation Medal With Valor, presented for acts of bravery in combat.



Lerman, right, poses for a photo with Safiullah, an Afghan contractor, during a 2011 deployment to Bagram Air Field, Afghanistan. Lerman helped save Safiullah's life after a rocket attack. After healing from his wounds, Safiullah returned to work shortly before Lerman completed his Afghanistan tour. Photo courtesy of U.S. Air Force



DEPARTMENT OF THE AIR FORCE

THIS IS TO CERTIFY THAT
THE AIR FORCE COMMENDATION MEDAL
(WITH VALOR)
HAS BEEN AWARDED TO
STAFF SERGEANT SAMUEL N. LERMAN
FOR
ACT OF COURAGE
10 SEPTEMBER 2011

ACCOMPLISHMENTS

GIVEN UNDER MY HAND
11 SEPTEMBER 2014

JOHN W. HESTERMAN III
Lieutenant General, USAF
Commander, USAFCENT

Responding to the Attack

Lerman, a former Civil Air Patrol cadet who was serving in the Air Force's 459th Security Forces Squadron as a response force leader, helped guard one of two largest control points in Afghanistan at the time.

"We usually had about 5,000 locals come through our checkpoints each day," he said.

Lerman, now 28, said night watches didn't have the same volume of people come through as the day shift, but almost all of the attacks occurred at night — which is what happened.

"I remember hearing the sudden screaming sound of rockets, followed by several explosions, which knocked out power to the area," he recalled.

Amid the chaos, Lerman's training came into play. He intuitively migrated to the sound of the blasts to provide assistance. When he made it outside, he noticed a checkpoint facility in his search area was severely damaged and three contractors — who had been working alongside U.S. military forces with an airfield security detail — were badly injured.

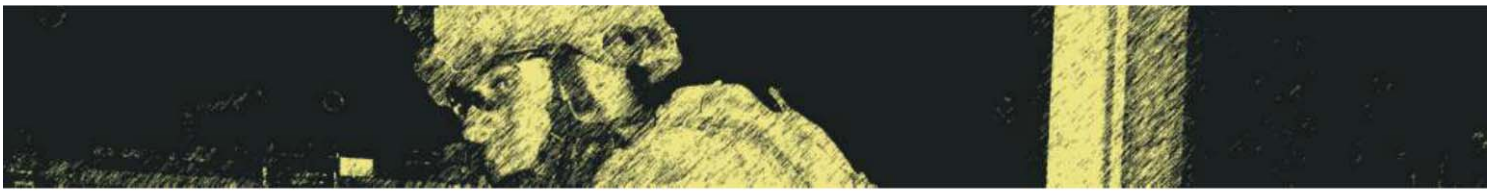
Within minutes, the crew preformed combat triage and lifesaving steps to keep the most critically wounded alive until they could be transported to the base hospital.

Lerman then turned his attention to an Afghan worker named Safiullah who had numerous injuries, including abdominal wounds, and was losing a critical amount of blood.

"He was slipping in and out of consciousness," Lerman said. "We knew we had to get him to the hospital as soon as possible."

He had no option but to recruit additional airmen, find a truck to transport the injured worker to the hospital on their own and tend to his wounds on the way.

"At one point, he actually stopped breathing for about 30 seconds, but fortunately he came back to,"



Lerman said.

After transporting the victim to a nearby hospital and briefing the doctors, Lerman headed back to the scene to check in with his leadership.

"Because of the chaos, the roads were blocked on the way back, and I ended up running the last leg of the trip," he remembered.

Upon his return, Lerman went up to a tower to man a machine gun position when a second set of blasts occurred.

"Then we spotted someone coming near us in the darkness, so I illuminated the sky by shooting 40 millimeter illumination rounds to see if he was wearing a suicide vest," Lerman said.

At the same time, the tower was fired on by an unseen shooter.

Lerman said the intruder approached his team multiple times, requiring them to disable him with nonlethal weapons. The team then radioed for another Security Forces team to capture him because of his location outside the perimeter.

By then, it was almost 1 a.m. and the scene was quieting down.

Lerman later visited the hospital where Safiullah and two other Afghan contractors were being treated. All three victims survived. Safiullah underwent several surgeries and is working again at the U.S. airfield.

Just before heading back to the U.S., Lerman visited the man one last time.

"He remembered me in the back of that pickup truck screaming at him to stay awake," Lerman said. "He thanked me over and over again."

From CAP to USAF

Lerman, who joined the Bethesda-Chevy Chase Composite Squadron of CAP's Maryland Wing in 2000 when he was 13, says CAP very much prepared him for his military career.

"Civil Air Patrol introduced me to the Air Force, taught me discipline and taught me about perseverance," he said.

As a cadet, he spent five years on various ground missions and participated in National Blue Beret and in Ground Search and Rescue School at the National Emergency Services Academy. He was also part of the disaster response ground teams for Hurricane Isabel in 2003.

He enlisted in the Air Force at 17. In 2005, then an airman first class in the Air National Guard, Lerman deployed as part of a joint task force in the immediate aftermath of Hurricane Katrina to conduct law enforcement operations in Louisiana.

He has been in the Air Force Security Forces for 10 years, both as a traditional reservist and Guardsman, and for a number of years he was on active duty in regular component units. He attended SWAT school in 2009 with the Colorado Springs Police Department; he graduated from Colorado College in Colorado Springs in 2010.

After serving in Afghanistan from mid-2011 to early 2012, Lerman spent 2012 and 2013 on the Air Force District of Washington Headquarters staff — first in protocol and then as the operations noncommissioned officer for the Security Forces Division. In 2012 he was awarded the German Armed Forces Badge for Weapons Proficiency (Schützenschnur) Silver Class for shooting expertise with German infantry weapons systems.

Today, he is a traditional reservist working as a sales manager at Quantico Tactical for Virginia in the Washington, D.C., area, selling weapons, equipment and gear to military and police departments.

Trained to Defend

What Lerman wants people to remember most about his actions in Afghanistan that September night is that it wasn't about him personally, but rather the role of Security Forces in protecting the Air Force in deployed operations.

"This is what every Security Forces member is trained to do — to respond when everything goes wrong. It's the job of every defender. It's just about where you are and when." ▲