

CCT @ The Eye of the Storm

MEMORIAL SERVICE SET FOR HURLBURT AIRMAN KILLED IN AFGHANISTAN from Air Force Special Operations Command Public Affairs Office.

The 23rd Special Tactics Squadron will host a memorial service for Senior Airman Daniel Sanchez at 9 a.m. Tuesday. The service at Freedom Hangar is open to those with access to Hurlburt Field.

September 22, 2010 – Hurlburt Field, Florida— As preparations are made for Tuesday’s memorial service for Senior Airman Daniel Sanchez, the commander of his squadron says those who knew him have drawn closer.

“It’s been tough, but Special Tactics is a close-knit family. We’ve come together and we’re working through the tough spots and continuing to execute our mission,” said Maj. Chris Larkin, commander of the 23rd Special Tactics Squadron.

Sanchez, an Air Force Special Operations Command combat controller, died Sept. 16 at a medical facility in Tarin Kwot, Afghanistan, after he was wounded by enemy fire.

A large contingent of Hurlburt Field airmen plans to attend his funeral in El Paso, Texas, Larkin said.

The squadron took on an additional mission this week: Each airman is involved in preparations for the memorial.

“I think that as we come together and remember Danny for the combat controller and the airman that he was, the preparation for the memorial service helps to bring back those good memories. It also gives everyone a sense of purpose,” Larkin said.

“We’re going to put on a memorial that is commensurate with the respect due for one of AFSOC’s finest warriors who has fallen in the line of duty,” he said.

The squadron is familiar with such services. It lost Staff Sgt. Timothy P. Davis on Feb. 20, 2009. The 28-year-old air combat controller was killed by an IED near Bagram, Afghanistan.

The halls of the Special Tactics Training Squadron at Hurlburt now have 13 airmen who have died since Sept. 11, 2001. Five of them were from the 23rd.

Special tactics airmen are often on the frontlines of combat. They travel with troops from other service branches and call in enemy coordinates for airstrikes.

NOTE: This online-only information was added to the CCT history after publication of *The Eye of the Storm – A history of Combat Control Teams*.

CCT @ The Eye of the Storm

Larkin described combat controllers as hard-charging, patriotic, self-motivated men who want to protect the American way of life.

Sanchez was no exception. Like others in his squadron, he lived up to the 23rd's motto, "We who dare." He was dedicated to his job and always had a positive attitude, his commander said.

"Danny's untimely death is a huge loss for Special Tactics, AFSOC and our nation," Larkin said. "Our deepest condolences go out to the Sanchez family."

ADDED DOD DETAILS: Sanchez, 23, of El Paso, Texas, was an Air Force Special Operations Command combat controller assigned to the 23rd Special Tactics Squadron at Hurlburt Field, according to AFSOC spokesman Matt Durham. He died supporting Operation Enduring Freedom after he was wounded by enemy fire in Oruzgan province. He was later pronounced dead from a gunshot wound at Tarin Kwot, Afghanistan.

"This terrible loss is evidence of the ultimate sacrifice our men in the Air Force Special Operations Command make to protect our country and our way of life," Major Chris Larkin, commander of the 23rd Special Tactics Squadron, said in a statement. "Danny was a fine airman and a valuable member of our close community and he will be sorely missed. My deepest sympathies go out to the Sanchez family."

The squadron will hold a memorial service honoring Sanchez sometime next week, Durham said. A date and time have not yet been set.

Sanchez was assigned to Hurlburt Field in September 2008 after qualifying as a combat controller. He leaves behind no dependents.

EXCERPT FROM EL PASO TIMES.COM, SEPTEMBER 20, 2010: Tattooed on Senior Airman Daniel R. Sanchez's torso was a quote that defined his short life.

Sanchez, 23, an El Paso native killed Thursday during combat operations in Afghanistan, also had colorful stars and planets inked onto his body. But it was the words of former President Theodore Roosevelt that help relatives understand why he put himself in mortal danger thousands of miles from home.

In part, the quote states: *"It is not the critic who counts; not the man who points out how the strong man stumbles or where the doer of deeds could have done better. The credit belongs to the man who is actually in the arena, whose face is marred by dust and sweat and blood ..."*

At age 4, Sanchez already was seeking adventure.

NOTE: This online-only information was added to the CCT history after publication of *The Eye of the Storm – A history of Combat Control Teams*.

CCT @ The Eye of the Storm

"He invented his own scuba gear," said Yvette Duchene, the airman's mother, during a Sunday interview at her East El Paso home. "He put socks on the ends of his feet like flippers. He had a big set of goggles and he had a backpack on his back.

Jumping off the roof gave him the sensation of flying, relatives said.

One day he appeared wearing a makeshift cape, imitating Darkwing Duck, a favorite Disney cartoon character. When the boy disappeared, a grandmother, Irene Sierra, became suspicious.

"I told (his mother), 'You'd better go check him. I bet he's going to go to the roof,'" Sierra said.

Despite his adventurous nature, he never broke any bones, Duchene said. However, in one family photo, he has a smear of blood on his forehead, which he banged jumping off a wall.

"He was a small Superman," Sierra said.

Sanchez liked to pull his brother and cousins into the excitement as well.

One day, when there apparently was little else to do, he duct-taped his younger brother, Dakota, to a gate, where their mother found him upon her return home. Dakota, now 10, was a willing participant. Duchene laughed and scolded them about damaging the paint.

"Most of it he didn't get in trouble for because of his smile," Dakota said.

Andee Olivares, a cousin who called Sanchez "Baby Daniel," was a few years older and felt responsibility to make sure no one got hurt during those escapades.

"I was picturing us growing old," Olivares said, tears clouding his eyes. "I wanted to meet his kids."

Sanchez liked going to school to play with friends, his mother said, but had trouble studying. He loved science, which was why he tattooed the solar system on his arm.

After graduating from Montwood High School in 2005, he began looking for a job.

When he joined the Air Force at 18, he already was set on becoming an elite warrior. His childhood dreams of flying and scuba diving were fulfilled in the 23rd Special Tactics Squadron. He looked at the military as a career and planned to become an instructor.

"That's my saving grace," Duchene said. "I couldn't imagine him sitting behind a desk."

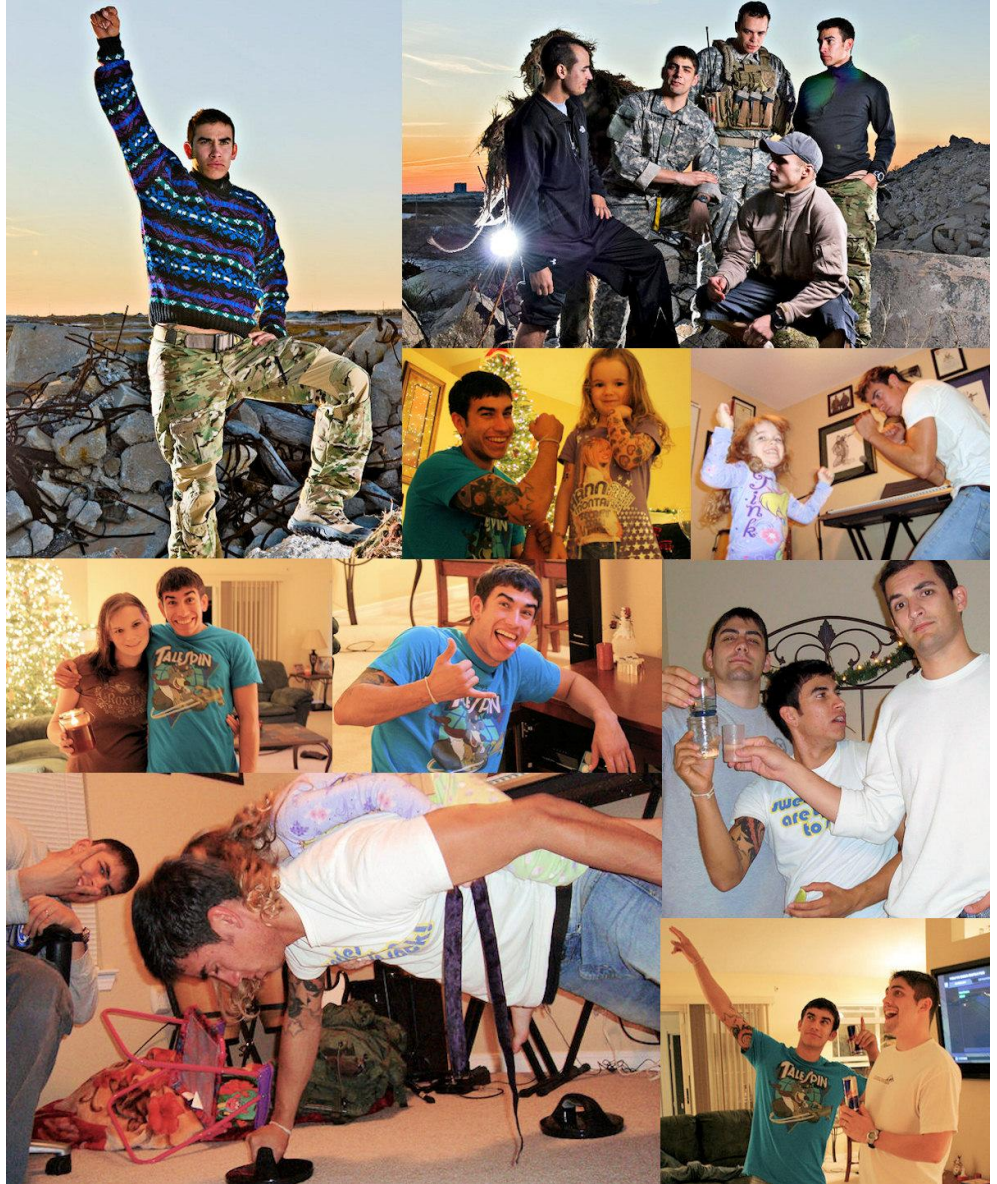
During a grueling 10-week training in San Antonio, Sanchez called his mother to tell her he would not quit. In the end, he was among eight graduates in a class of about 200 men.

NOTE: This online-only information was added to the CCT history after publication of The Eye of the Storm – A history of Combat Control Teams.

CCT @ The Eye of the Storm

Sanchez's special tactics unit performs duties at the request of the president and the secretary of defense, according to a fact sheet on its website. Its missions include rescue and recovery, battlefield trauma care, direct action and reconnaissance.

Sanchez deployed overseas for the first time in July. He called and e-mailed often, but did not talk about his experiences in Afghanistan, relatives said. During his last call home he told an aunt that he had been wearing the same clothes for the past few days and was tired. A few days earlier, he had assured his mother, "Don't worry, I'm fine."



>>>>

Family photos courtesy Sgt. Mac's Bar

Duchene said Air Force personnel had not informed her of the circumstances of her son's death.

Her 5-foot, 11-inch son was "skinny and scrawny" before he joined the military, Duchene said. But when she hugged him lately, she could feel the hard muscles.

"He was tough," she said. Duchene rolls her eyes when asked about the tattoos adorning his body. He had tried to appease her by inking a message of love for her on his left leg.

Sanchez was proud of the tattoos, including the Roosevelt quote. It proved prophetic.

NOTE: This online-only information was added to the CCT history after publication of *The Eye of the Storm – A history of Combat Control Teams*.

CCT @ The Eye of the Storm

"The credit belongs to the man ... who spends himself for a worthy cause," the quote continues, "who, at the best, knows, in the end, the triumph of high achievement, and who, at the worst, if he fails, at least he fails while daring greatly, so that his place shall never be with those cold and timid souls who knew neither victory nor defeat."

NOTE: This online-only information was added to the CCT history after publication of *The Eye of the Storm – A history of Combat Control Teams*.