

21ST STS COMBAT CONTROLLER AWARDED SILVER STAR by Matt Durham Air Force Special Operations Command Public Affairs

September 29, 2011 - Pope Field, North Carolina (AFNS) -- When you are an Air Force Combat Controller in Afghanistan "just doing my job" can make for a very eventful day at the office.



That is how Staff Sgt. C. Caleb Gilbreath described his actions in a running firefight against the Taliban in Konduz Province Oct. 30 to Nov. 6, 2008, earning him a Silver Star for bravery.

Lt. Gen. Eric Fiel, the commander of Air Force Special Operations Command, presided over the ceremony. (USAF Photo)

Gilbreath was assigned to a U.S. Army Special Forces team when his unit was ambushed by a large Taliban force outside of a local village. As mortar and rocket-propelled grenade rounds impacted within 15 feet of his position, Gilbreath directed pinpoint bomb strikes that devastated the enemy and halted the attack, according to reports.

Later, Gilbreath's team began a clearing operation in a nearby village when they again came under attack from an estimated 120 Taliban and foreign fighters, officials said.

Surrounded by the enemy, the team reached the center of the town as bullets and shrapnel impacted Gilbreath's vehicle from all directions.

As the tightly packed buildings made the teams withdrawal impossible, Gilbreath began to direct strafing runs against insurgent fighters dug-in just 30 feet from his position, according to the medal citation. For the next hour Gilbreath was in a partially exposed position in a gun truck, taking fire and directed eight more air strikes against the Taliban fighters. The close-air support turned the tide of the battle and allowed his team to defeat the enemy with no friendly casualties.

"I don't feel particularly special," Gilbreath said. "I believe any of the Combat Controllers I work with would have done the same thing. Everything just slows down and you execute."

Gilbreath received the Silver Star and Bronze Star at Pope Field, NC on September 23, 2011. (USAF Photo)



Gilbreath, a former Army Ranger, received the Silver Star and a Bronze Star at a ceremony at Pope Field, N.C., on Sept. 23. Lt. Gen. Eric Fiel, the commander of Air Force Special Operations Command, presided over the ceremony. He pinned the medal in front of a packed house of family members, friends and fellow Combat Controllers. Also looking on were members of the 3rd Special Forces Group, teammates of Gilbreath during the firefight.

"Caleb looked death in the face and did not cower from the situation," Fiel said. "He showed tremendous poise, self-control and courage under fire."

One ceremony speaker noted that, ironically, the section of Afghanistan the 3rd Special Forces Group was assigned to during the battle had been fairly quiet prior to Gilbreath's arrival.

A member of the 21st Special Tactics Squadron in 2009, Gilbreath is now an instructor at the Combat Control School here. There he teaches Combat Control candidates what he learned through combat.

"It's always a team thing...always," he said.

Lt. Col. Jerry Kung, the Commander of the 342nd Training Squadron, who oversees the school, said he hopes the candidates will learn from Gilbreath. Calling Gilbreath "a machine" for the way he carried himself during what was a very high pressure and dangerous situation, Kung said he wasn't surprised the air commando was modest about his actions.

"There is no room for the individual," Kung said. "You do your job and the whole team succeeds. Anything else -- that does not work for us."