

The Oregonian

Corbett native likely dead in Afghanistan

The brother of Jeffrey Alan Lucas, a U.S. Navy SEAL, thinks he was among the 16 killed

Friday, July 01, 2005

DAVID AUSTIN

A 33-year-old Corbett native is among the 16 soldiers and sailors who died this week in the apparent shooting down of a military helicopter in eastern Afghanistan, according to a family member.

Jeffrey Alan Lucas was a member of the U.S. Navy SEALs and was aboard the special operations helicopter Tuesday when it likely was struck by a rocket-propelled grenade, said Jamie Lucas, the soldier's brother.

Jamie Lucas said Thursday that military officials had informed the family that the crash site of the Chinook MH-47 helicopter had been located and personnel had secured the area. Initially, stormy weather prevented rescue efforts.

All 16 bodies were recovered Thursday, the military said. Forensic experts will examine the bodies to determine the identities of those on board, Lucas said.

"I know that he was on board but still, in a situation like this, you try to hold out some kind of hope," Lucas said of his older brother. "He was so tough and he had so much drive. You want to think that he could get through something like this, but it's not likely."

The Chinook was carrying Navy SEAL commandos and an Army air crew. They had been called out as urgently needed reinforcements after radio calls from troops in the field said they were engaged in combat with insurgents, according to military personnel.

Initial reports put the number on board the helicopter at 17, but officials later acknowledged the first count was a mistake.

Lt. Commander Greg Hicks, a spokesman for the U.S. Department of Defense, would not confirm whether Jeffrey Lucas was on the helicopter. He said officials won't release the names of the dead soldiers and sailors until all families are notified.

Jamie Lucas, 32, remembered his brother as a thriving athlete who graduated from Corbett High School in 1989. Jeffrey Lucas played football, basketball and baseball at the high school, his brother said. He also participated in track and field.

"Whatever sport was going on, that's what he was a part of," Jamie Lucas said.

Jeffrey Lucas joined the military right out of high school and spent time in Florida early in his career. His brother said Lucas wanted to be a Navy SEAL from the start. He served as a sniper with his unit, Jamie Lucas said.

Lucas recalled when his brother was undergoing a rigorous round of training with the SEALs and suffered a serious bout of heatstroke.

"It was pretty bad," Lucas remembered. "He was in a coma for about three days. When he came out of it, he wanted to get right back to work. He had to requalify for his job. He was so tough there wasn't going to be anything that stopped him from getting back there."

Last year at Thanksgiving, Jeffrey Lucas called his family from his base in Virginia Beach, Va., to inform everyone that he was awarded the honor of top Navy SEAL on the East Coast, Jamie Lucas said.

"Our mom knew he was up for the award, but she kept things quiet," Lucas said. "We were all over at my aunt and uncle's house for Thanksgiving dinner when he called and told us the news. He was really happy. They only name one each year for the East and West coasts. It was a big deal."

Jeffrey Lucas was deployed to Afghanistan in early April. At first, his unit was set to go later that month. But Lucas and two other snipers were called up because they were needed earlier than the rest of their unit, Jaime Lucas said.

Jeffrey Lucas and his wife, Rhonda, lived in Virginia Beach. The couple have a 4-year-old son, Seth. Patricia Lucas of Gladstone, the SEAL's mother, is staying with the family in Virginia.

Jeff Lucas is the 56th person with strong Oregon ties to have been killed in Afghanistan, Pakistan or Iraq since Sept. 11, 2001. He is the 49th military person to die.

Family believes Navy son dead

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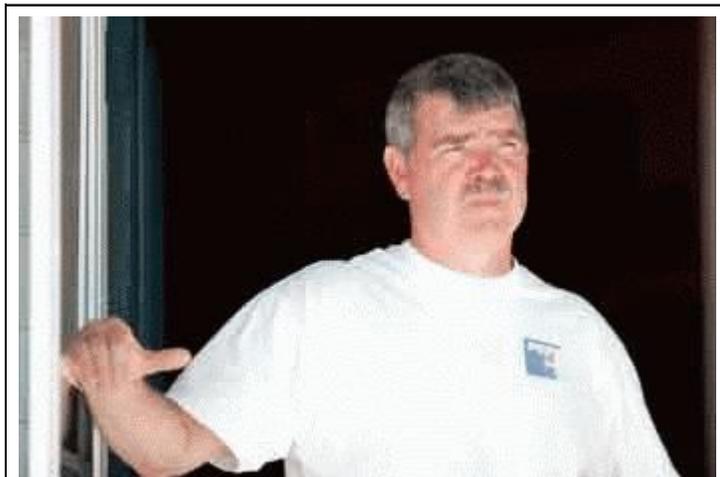
By Ernestine Bousquet

The Bulletin

PRINEVILLE — For 17 years, 34-year-old Jeff Lucas had been a Navy SEAL, a dream that catapulted him from his hometown of Corbett near Portland to the thick of battle in Afghanistan.

"He said, 'Dad, I was born to be a SEAL.' He just loved it," said his father, Rick Lucas, a substitute teacher who lives in Prineville.

That destiny ended Tuesday in the mountains of northern Afghanistan. Rick Lucas said his ex-wife, Pat Lucas, got confirmation Thursday that Jeff was among Navy SEALs killed when a helicopter carrying U.S. special forces crashed after hostile fire hit it.



Prineville resident Rick Lucas stands in the doorway of his home on Thursday after phone calls from relatives led him to believe his son may have been killed in a helicopter crash in Afghanistan.
Rob Kerr / The Bulletin

The U.S. Department of Defense had not released the victims' names as of Thursday night.

Maj. Paul Swiergosz, a Defense Department spokesman, confirmed Thursday afternoon that all 16 of the U.S. military service members on the MH-47 Chinook helicopter died in the crash. The military had initially reported that 17 people were on the flight, but one passenger apparently missed the flight.

The helicopter appeared to have been shot down a rocket-propelled grenade by enemy fire, said Lt. Gen. James Conway, director of operations for the Joint Chiefs of Staff, at a news briefing on Thursday. The special forces were flying to combat in the Kunar province in northeastern Afghanistan near the Pakistan border.

Defense Department spokesman Swiergosz said all of the bodies had been recovered from the crash site, but he was not sure when they would be returned to the U.S.

The dead on the helicopter included eight Navy SEALs and eight Army air crew, according to The Associated Press. A storm and rugged terrain hampered rescue attempts and stalled the recovery by about 36 hours from the time the chopper went down, the AP reported.

At home Thursday night, Rick Lucas struggled with the news that his son had died. He had spent the past 24 hours hoping that Jeff would be found alive after his ex-wife called him on Wednesday.

"I just feel sorry and at a loss for words," he said. "I feel like I lost a good friend."

He said he felt comforted by the knowledge that Jeff had not been caught and tortured before he died and that he had been doing what he loved.

His family was already planning to hold a memorial service in Jeff's hometown of Corbett, a small town 20 miles east of Portland in the Columbia Gorge, where his ashes would be scattered in a special spot that Jeff had picked out.

Earlier Thursday, Rick Lucas tried to stay busy at his Prineville home, where an American flag fluttered in the wind, as he and his girlfriend, Gladys Binam, waited to hear more about Jeff.

Memories of his strong-willed son flooded Rick Lucas' mind.

Jeff was a family man who doted on his wife, Rhonda, and his 4-year-old son, Seth. They live in Virginia Beach, Va., where Jeff had been stationed for the past several years, Rick Lucas said.

An avid golfer, Jeff bought Seth his own set of toy clubs so that he could teach him how to hit.

Jeff was an outgoing athlete growing up. He was a running back at Corbett High School and played basketball and ran track, Rick Lucas said. Jeff loved to ski, learning to carve turns on the slopes of Mount Hood beside his father.

After graduating, Jeff joined the Navy at 17, with his sights set on becoming a SEAL. The move surprised Rick Lucas, even though he had spent three years in the Army himself.

"The recruiter said, 'If any kid can make it, he would,' " he said. "Nothing was too big for him. No mountain was too high for him to climb."

The SEALs are a combat force that undergo tough mental and physical training to operate on land, in the air and underwater, according to the Navy SEALs Web site.

Rick Lucas said Jeff was always at the head of his class during training. He became an expert marksman who could shoot a target with either hand.

He remembered Jeff telling him that during basic training, recruits had to do a 2-mile nighttime swim as part of their training exercises one time. When they got to shore, a few of them asked for blankets because it was cold. The drill sergeant said if they wanted a blanket, they weren't Navy SEAL material. "He said, 'Dad, I never asked for a blanket,' " Rick Lucas said.

Jeff served multiple tours, including one in Iraq. His Afghanistan tour started last November, Rick Lucas said.

He never talked about his special missions or what kind of action he saw, his father said.

"He said, 'It's psychological. You don't want to give up. They teach you in Navy SEALs never to give up.' " Rick Lucas said.

He couldn't help thinking of what he told his son after one of his tours.

"I said, 'Man you are my hero,' "

Tuesday's helicopter crash was the second in Afghanistan this year. On April 6, 15 U.S. service members and three American civilians were killed when their chopper went down in a sandstorm while returning to the main U.S. base at Bagram, the AP reported.

The crash also follows three months of fighting. The fighting has killed about 465 suspected insurgents, 43 Afghan police and soldiers, 125 civilians, and 45 U.S. troops, including the 16 killed in Tuesday's crash, the AP reported.

Afghan and American officials have predicted the situation will deteriorate before legislative elections in September. Ernestine Bousquet can be reached at 541-504-2336 or at ebousquet@bendbulletin.com.

The Associated Press contributed to this report.

The Oregonian

'No way he wasn't going to reach his dream'

The family of Jeffrey Lucas, a Navy SEAL who died in a crash in Afghanistan, says he was destined for the military

Saturday, July 02, 2005

DAVID AUSTIN

Jeffrey Lucas was destined to be in the military.

Since he was a child, the country boy from Corbett wanted to be a Navy SEAL. The specialized, elite combat force was -- in the words of a report Lucas wrote in the third grade -- "the best."

When he was young, Lucas used to sneak up on people dressed in camouflage that he made from brush. He used to practice target shooting at long distances. And he built traps to capture rodents in the yard.

"He could surprise anyone," says Jamie Lucas, 32, Jeffrey's younger brother. "He was always so fast, so smart and so sure of himself. There was no way he wasn't going to reach his dream."

Today, Jamie Lucas and his family are in mourning. Jeffrey Alan Lucas, 33, died earlier this week in eastern Afghanistan after the MH-47 Chinook helicopter he was aboard was shot down, apparently by a rocket-propelled grenade. He leaves behind a wife and 4-year-old son.

Lucas, along with 15 other sailors and soldiers, died in the crash. The dead included eight Navy SEALs and eight U.S. Army air crew members. The SEAL unit had been called up for duty in Afghanistan in April.

Jeffrey Lucas was a 1989 graduate of Corbett High School. His destiny was set long before he enlisted at age 17. His skills, family members say, made him a natural for the military.

Jamie Lucas was in awe of his brother's abilities as a tactician and a sharpshooter.

The younger Lucas remembers waking up from the couch one night after hearing a noise in the basement of the family's Corbett home. He walked downstairs to find Jeffrey Lucas with a BB gun. He was picking off mice as they walked across a beam on the other side of the basement.

"I guess I shouldn't say this in front of my family, but we'd mostly shoot at each other with BB guns," Jamie Lucas recalls. "We'd throw rocks, break windows, stuff like that. We were just kids living in the country, and we had a lot of fun."

Other than riding dirt motorbikes, snowmobiling and fishing, Jeffrey Lucas liked to practice for his future in the military.

Jamie Lucas says his brother would hop on a motorbike and ride the back trails to a nearby Bible camp. He'd sneak into the camp, crawl across a creek on his belly and climb underneath some of the structures where the participants gathered.

Once he knew where everyone was, Jeffrey Lucas sneaked into the cabins and took candy from the campers, his brother says. "I went with him once, but I got caught by a dog," Jamie Lucas recalls. "He was mad because I blew his cover. He wouldn't let me go anymore. He honed his skills at that Bible camp."

Later, when Jeffrey Lucas became a SEAL, he told his younger brother about the time four years ago that he shot an antelope in Wyoming at 960 yards.

"It was part of his regular training," Jamie Lucas says. "He was with his spotter, and he asked how far away this pair of antelope was. When the spotter told him, 'Oh, about 640 yards,' my brother said he wanted the distance on the farther one. He took it in one shot."

Linda Traxler, Jeffrey's aunt, says she saw a lot of the rugged youngster as a child. Her three children were younger than the Lucas boys, but they always played together.

"Living in the country, the boys always had time to get into everything," she remembers. "They were all good boys, but every one of them looked up to Jeffrey. He was a leader and a mentor."

On Tuesday, Jamie Lucas was on his way to the veterinarian, taking a horse with an eye problem in for an exam. His brother's wife had called from her home in Virginia Beach, Va. When he returned home, he learned that the copter carrying his brother had gone down.

"No way, no way, no way," he remembers thinking. "I told her that can't be. He'd been in lots of close calls before, but Jeff would always say that those were just hard landings."

Now Jamie Lucas fights back tears. His older brother, his guide, his friend is gone.

"I want to think that he was too smart, too fast to be dead," he says, crying. "There's no way it'd be him out there. He's always the best at everything, so he could survive."

"But it's sunk in now. They might as well just take half of me away. I lost my brother and my best friend. With him, it was always easy because he'd set the bar, and you'd know where to set the bar to measure greatness."

The Virginian-Pilot

3 local SEALs among dead in Afghan helicopter crash

By **LOUIS HANSEN, JACK DORSEY AND KATE WILTROUT** , The Virginian-Pilot
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VIRGINIA BEACH — At least three local Navy SEALs were among the 16 servicemen killed in Tuesday's Chinook M-47 helicopter crash into the rugged mountains of eastern Afghanistan, it was learned Friday. .

Navy officials confirmed that eight SEALs and eight Army Special Forces were aboard the helicopter when enemy fighters shot it down with a rocket propelled grenade. Some of the Navy commandos were from Coronado Naval Amphibious Base near San Diego.

Family members and friends on Friday confirmed the deaths of three SEALs team members from Virginia Beach: Jeffrey Taylor, 30; Michael McGreevy, 30; and Jeffrey Lucas, 33. McGreevy was an officer and the others were enlisted.

Cmdr. Jeff Bender , a spokesman for the Navy's special warfare command in San Diego, said all the casualties will be officially identified after families have been notified.

It was largest number of casualites suffered by the SEALs since the elite unit was formed in 1962, according to Bender and other military officials.

In Afghanistan, U.S. forces desperately scoured rugged Afghan mountains Friday for an elite American military team missing in the same area where a U.S. helicopter was shot down.

A purported Taliban spokesman claimed militants captured one of the men.

U.S. forces were using "every available asset" to search for the missing men, U.S. military spokesman Lt. Col. Jerry O'Hara said.

"Until we find our guys, they are still listed as unaccounted for and everything we got in that area is oriented on finding the missing men," he said.

The missing troops are a small team from the special operations forces, said military officials, speaking Friday on the condition of anonymity because rescue operations were still under way.

Though the team has been missing since Tuesday, the military had refrained from discussing their situation to prevent the Taliban from setting out in search of them.

The downed helicopter had been trying to "extract the soldiers" Tuesday when it went into the mountains near Asadabad, close to the Pakistani border, O'Hara said.

The Taliban claim to have kidnapped one of the men came from purported spokesman Mullah Latif Hakimi. "One high-ranking American has been captured in fighting in the same area as the helicopter went down," he told The Associated Press. "I won't give you any more details now."

Reacting to the claim, O'Hara said, "We have no proof or evidence indicating anything other than the soldiers are missing."

Friends and family described Taylor, who grew up in West Virginia, as a quiet, country boy with a love for hunting and his dogs.

Erin Taylor, his wife, said in an e-mail to The Virginian-Pilot that the two met five years ago and recently married. Taylor said her husband was "honest, compassionate, and giving to a fault."

"He knew his place was fighting side by side with his best friends to bring peace and avoid future attacks on American soil," she said. "Jeff knew his calling and his place in life."

Jason Hoffman, a neighbor, got to know the young couple and their three frisky dogs over the last several months. He said Taylor dreamed of opening a shooting school in West Virginia with his re-enlistment bonus.

Robin Hailey, another neighbor, said Taylor asked him and other neighbors to check in on his wife when he went on deployment about 10 weeks ago.

"He was a humble, honest man," he said.

McGreevy grew up in Portville, N.Y., a hamlet 80 miles south of Buffalo. Kevin Curran, his high school principal, said McGreevy was a top athlete and scholar who went on to graduate from the Naval Academy in 1997.

"I called a retired teacher who knew Mike when he was here and the first thing out of his mouth was, 'He's the best we ever had,'" Curran said Friday in a telephone interview.

McGreevy ran track, setting a school record for the 800-meter run, wrestled, played soccer and youth ice hockey.

"We had a teacher go through the yearbook and just put Post-its on pages where his picture was," Curran said. "He was involved in everything: student council, national honor society, clubs, athletics."

Friends gathered near the McGreevy's house Friday afternoon to remember the neighbor who helped fix their fences, jogged through the streets with his infant daughter in a stroller, and mowed his lawn in a gym shorts and combat boots.

His mother, Patty, recently moved to Virginia Beach to be closer to Michael, his wife Laura, and their one-year-old daughter.

When at home, he spent much of his time doting on his daughter. "He valued those moments," said Sherry Snyder, a neighbor. "I don't think there's anything Mike regretted."

Across the continent, in Corbett, Ore., Jamie Lucas, 32, remembered a boyhood spent with his athletic older brother, Jeffrey.

They went skiing, rode motorcycles, played football and basketball. In between two-a-day summer football practices, they'd round up other players and head to the Columbia River to cool off.

Lucas remembered his brother having an early inclination about how he wanted to spend his life.

“He wrote a paper in about fourth grade and it was all about the special forces,” Jamie Lucas said in a phone interview. “Green Berets, Army Rangers, Marine recon, Navy SEALs. He said he was going to be a Navy SEAL one day because they were the best.”

Lucas said his brother enlisted a few months after graduating from high school in 1989 .

Rhonda and Jeff Lucas have been married for 12 years, his brother said. They have a four-year-old son, Seth. Rhonda Lucas could not be reached on Friday. A friend at the couple’s house said the family wanted privacy.

“It’s just devastating and terribly hard on her and her family,” said Maggie Test , a friend and colleague of Rhonda Lucas. Both women run pet sitting services and share clients, and Test has taken over Lucas’ customers for awhile.

“She accepted what he did, but nobody ever believes their husband isn’t coming back,” Test said, choking back sobs. “You feel so helpless as a friend. There’s nothing you can say or do.”

The Associated Press contributed to this report.

The New York Times

Names of Crash Victims Emerge, and Families Mourn

By [RICK LYMAN](#)

Published: July 2, 2005

Steve Reich never expressed regret that his promising professional baseball career lasted only two games for a Baltimore Orioles farm team before the Army summoned him back to active duty 10 years ago.

"When the Army said they couldn't spare him, that was it," said Gary Fitzherbert, a longtime friend of the Reich family in Washington, Conn. "No argument. Baseball was a big dream, but it always came second place to the service."

Major Reich, 34, a West Point graduate, was in the command seat of the Chinook MH-47 helicopter that was shot down on Tuesday in a treacherous mountain ravine in eastern Afghanistan, killing him and 15 others trying to relieve a Special Forces team battling resurgent rebels. As the names of the dead began to emerge late this week, families and friends were assimilating the news.

Danny Graves of the New York Mets remembered Major Reich, his fellow pitcher on the U.S. National Baseball Team, for which they played in the early 1990's. "He was so polite and respectful that when he talked everyone on the team kept their mouth shut," Mr. Graves said. "It was like we knew that we had to listen. We were all young, immature kids just dreaming about playing big-league baseball. His dream was to serve his country. You knew a couple of minutes after meeting him that's what he wanted to do and what he was going to do."

American military officials in the Afghan capital said they had confirmed that all 16 on the helicopter died in the crash, which Pentagon officials said had apparently been caused by a rocket-propelled grenade. The victims were seven soldiers from Hunter Army Airfield, Ga.; one soldier from Fort Campbell, Ky.; and eight Navy Seal commandos assigned to units in Virginia Beach and San Diego.

Eight of the names had become public by late yesterday. Pentagon spokesmen said a full list would not be released until all of the families had been notified.

In Honolulu, Robyn Healy, former wife of Senior Chief Petty Officer Dan Healy, 36, said she and their two children had received word of his death on Wednesday. Chief Healy had been a member of the Seals and had spent 15 years in the military.

"He was just a good guy, always joking around," Ms. Healy said.

In Franklin, Tenn., Mayor Tom Miller had a press conference on Thursday to announce that his son-in-law, Sgt. First Class James Ponder III, who was stationed at Fort Campbell, died in the crash. Mr. Miller described his son-in-law, a flight engineer known as Tre, as "not real tall, somewhat thin, but tough as nails."

Sergeant Ponder, 36, joined the Army shortly after graduating from the Battle Ground Academy in Franklin. He left behind a wife and two daughters, ages 6 and 7.

Jim Bowman of Midway, W.Va., said he had been informed that his stepson, Petty Officer First Class Jeff Taylor of Little Creek, Va., was among the dead. Mr. Taylor, 30, was a member of the Seals who left behind a wife, Erin.

The parents of Jeff Lucas, a 34-year-old member of the Seals from Corbett, Ore., said they had gotten confirmation Thursday that he was among the dead. He had a wife, Rhoda, and a 4-year-

old son. "No mountain was too high for him to climb," said Mr. Lucas's father, Rick, in an interview with The Bulletin of Bend, Ore.

Word came from Representative Jon Porter, Republican of Nevada, that Shane Patton, a member of the Seals from Boulder City, Nev., had been killed. Lee Russell of Stafford, Va., said he had received the same news about his 31-year-old son, Master Sgt. Michael Russell of the Army.

Lt. Michael M. McGreevy's classmates at the United States Naval Academy said there had been no doubt that Mr. McGreevy, a midshipman nicknamed Groove, would end up a commando.

"Everyone knew he was going to be a Seal from the get-go," said t. Randy C. Cruz, who had been class treasurer the year Lieutenant McGreevy had been class secretary.

Classmates remembered Lieutenant McGreevy, 30, as a model Annapolis man, but teachers in Portville, N.Y., his hometown, said he had ended up at the academy by chance.

Statement by Governor Ted Kulongoski on Death of Soldier

Flags to be flown at half-staff on July 6, 2005

(Salem, OR) – Governor Theodore R. Kulongoski asked that all flags at public institutions be flown at half-staff on Wednesday, July 6, 2005 in memory and honor of Petty Officer First Class Jeffery A. Lucas of Corbett, Oregon.

Lucas, 33, died June 28, 2005 near Asadabad, Afghanistan in Kumar Province when the MH-47 helicopter he was on crashed. PO1 Lucas was assigned to the Navy's SEAL Team Ten of Virginia Beach, Virginia.

"Petty Officer First Class Jeffery Lucas' loved ones have lost a devoted family member and friend, our country has lost a valiant soldier, and Oregon has lost a future leader," said Governor Kulongoski. "We should honor his bravery and commitment to our country as we send our condolences to his friends and family, and remind those families with loved ones still in Iraq and Afghanistan that our thoughts and prayers remain focused on their swift and safe return home."

The Virginian-Pilot

Mourning the loss of Navy SEALs

The Virginian-Pilot
© July 6, 2005

This wasn't the Independence Day holiday weekend we had hoped for. Not because pewter skies robbed some of the sizzle from fireworks, parades and backyard barbecues.

It was that our mundane weekends played out against the heroics of five local Navy SEALs who died trying to rescue four comrades doing reconnaissance in an Afghan no-man's land. Of those four, two are dead, one is injured and one unaccounted for. They have yet to be identified.

The contrast between the celebrations at home and the sacrifices abroad draped the weekend with an unexpected double meaning about what it takes — and what some are anonymously willing to give — to be an American.

So far, we know that a helicopter carrying eight SEALs and eight Army Special Forces was shot down by a rocket-propelled grenade before they could make the rescue. Among the dead are five sailors from SEAL Team 10 based at Little Creek Naval Amphibious Base: Chief Petty Officer Jacques J. Fontan; Lt. Cmdr. Erik Kristensen; Petty Officer 1st Class Jeffrey Lucas; Lt. Michael McGreevy; and Petty Officer 1st Class Jeffrey Taylor.

This brings to 10 the number of locally based SEALs who have died fighting the Taliban, an enormous loss to a Navy community numbering no more than a thousand. More devastating is the loss to their families. Four of the five leave behind widows and three had children.

It is stunning in its own way to those of us who live on the periphery of their lives. We see them tend their lawns, kneel beside their families in church, applaud their kids at school programs and joke with friends over a beer on the backyard deck. The death of such seemingly ordinary men in extraordinary circumstances unleashes its own kind of disorienting shock.

We have no concept of the double life led by SEALs and the military's special warfare units except when a tragedy like this one gives us a tiny window into the threatening world they inhabit.

So secret are their missions that the public is rarely given a chance to celebrate their victories or show appreciation for their invisible service to the nation.

That's more reason to mourn their loss .

The Virginian-Pilot

10 killed under fire honored in service



Shadow boxes, photos and mission equipment were displayed at a service honoring 10 elite service men – including six from Little Creek Naval Amphibious Base, shown above – on the base in Virginia Beach on Friday. **AARON PETERSON/U.S. NAVY**

By LOUIS HANSEN, The Virginian-Pilot

© July 9, 2005

VIRGINIA BEACH — More than a mile above sea level in the Afghan mountains, four SEALs on a reconnaissance mission on June 28 took enemy fire in terrain thick with Taliban and al-Qaida fighters.

The crew of eight Army Special Forces and eight Navy SEALs heard their emergency call, boarded a specially-equipped MH-47 Chinook helicopter and sped into the mountain fight. They would not return alive.

On Friday morning, the aftershock of the Afghan battle resonated through a naval base and a community 7,000 miles away.

Nearly 2,600 mourners converged on Little Creek Naval Amphibious Base to remember and grieve the lives of 10 SEALs killed last week fighting terrorists in a covert mission. Six were based at Little Creek.

Family, friends, service members, elected leaders and the tight, secretive community of SEALs filled the base theater and gymnasium to grieve the worst loss of Navy special forces since World War II.

“These men bravely and unselfishly answered the nation’s call to defend freedom and protect America and its allies from terrorism,” said Rear Adm. Joseph Maguire in remarks to reporters after the closed ceremony.

The 16 elite service men died when a rocket-propelled grenade apparently struck their helicopter. Two of the four SEALs on the reconnaissance mission were killed, and another wounded and rescued. A search operation remains active for the final man.

Six of the SEALs killed in the battle were based at Little Creek: Chief Petty Officer Jacques J. Fontan, 36; Lt. Cmdr. Erik S. Kristensen, 33; Petty Officer 1st Class Jeffrey A. Lucas, 33; Lt. Michael M. McGreevy, 30; Petty Officer 1st Class Jeffrey S. Taylor, 30; and Petty Officer 2nd Class Danny P. Dietz, 25.

Dietz was one of the four SEALs conducting intelligence operations in Kunar Province. The other men were killed in the helicopter crash.

Kunar sits along the Pakistani border in eastern Afghanistan, and is considered a lawless stretch of rugged lands controlled by local warlords and tribes.

It is reputed to hold the lair of Osama bin Laden, and has been the focus of several U.S. military operations.

Maguire said that the mission, known as Operation Red Wing, was an effort to defeat terrorists operating in the region. Maguire oversees the Naval Special Warfare Command.

Maguire said the rescued SEAL is in good condition at the military medical center in Landstuhl, Germany.

The SEAL survived for three days eluding and sometimes engaging enemy fighters before being rescued.

Maguire said the lessons learned from the operation will pay “tremendous dividends.”

On Friday, the military community was devoted to mourning and remembrance. Maguire said the two-hour service paid honor to the fallen men and the history and loyalty of Navy frogmen.

The ceremony also honored the Army Special Forces. “We are one team, one force,” Maguire said.

A family member or a close friend eulogized each of the six local men. Video screens flashed pictures and tributes.

A small display of memorabilia from each of the 10 fallen men was built from swim fins, life jackets, masks, wet belts, CO2 cartridges and engraved K-Bars .

The K-Bars are special knives given to new SEALs. Each is engraved with the name of a former SEAL, and where they died in combat.

Maguire said the men took on a difficult mission without hesitation. “The loss of these brave warriors will only strengthen our resolve.”

Reach Louis Hansen at (757) 446-2322 or at louis.hansen@pilotonline.com.

The Virginian-Pilot

A Navy wife copes with loss



Rhonda Lucas cradles her son, Seth, as she recounts her life with Jeff Lucas, a Navy SEAL who died last month. STEPHEN M. KATZ/THE VIRGINIAN-PILOT

By LOUIS HANSEN, The Virginian-Pilot
© July 19, 2005 | [Last updated 6:46 PM Jul. 19](#)

VIRGINIA BEACH — Their plans were set.

Rhonda and Jeff Lucas were to meet in Germany next week. They would spend 10 days together while family watched their 4-year-old son, Seth, back home.

Then Rhonda would wait until October when Jeff's fifth deployment would be over. He needed a little more than three years to reach his Navy retirement.

Jeff Lucas, 33, joked that he'd become a professional golfer with his GI Bill. Maybe Rhonda, also 33, would go back to school and become a dental hygienist. They always had plans.

Nearly two weeks ago, a pair of Navy officers reached her door. Petty Officer 1st Class Jeffrey A. Lucas – husband, father, confidant, prankster and Navy SEAL – was missing in action, presumed dead somewhere in Afghanistan.

A helicopter crash had killed 16 members of the special operations forces, including eight SEALs. It was the worst loss for elite Navy forces since World War II.

Rhonda Lucas sat on a leather chair in her living room a few days ago and replayed her recent days of loss and pain. Seth sat on her lap and hugged her.

The signature tools of a Navy commando's life – swim fins, a K-Bar combat knife, and dive mask – were temporarily kept on the table in the neat dining room.

“My life has been Jeff's life,” she said softly. “Now I have to figure out what my life is.”

Rhonda and Jeff Lucas met at a friend's party near Portland, Ore., when they were 19. She grew up in the Northwest, her family living in Oregon, Washington and Alaska, where her father worked on a commercial fishing rig.

Jeff was from rural Oregon, a town named Corbett, with nurseries, berry farms and logging trails, and only 600 children in its public school system.

Soon, he introduced her to his younger brother, Jamie. “Hey, this is my girlfriend, Rhonda.” A year later, he brought her around to his family again. “Hey, this is my wife, Rhonda.”

They both had plans. She wanted to be a dental hygienist. He wanted to be a Navy SEAL.

Pat Lucas always knew her oldest son would follow other men in the family and go into the service. At birth, his mother said, “he came out screaming.”

In fourth grade, Jeff wrote an essay about military special forces, explaining that the best were Navy SEALs.

In the basement of the family's rented home, young Jeff watched mice crawl along a ledge under the floorboards. He sat in an old chair, aimed his BB gun, and dropped mouse after mouse.

He starred at Corbett High School in football, basketball, baseball and track. He's a local legend, as much for being a 150-pound all-state tailback as for being a SEAL.

Jamie Lucas remembers the high school basketball game when his 5-foot-8-inch point-guard brother led his team against another that had no player shorter than 6 feet 1 inch.

Lucas torched them for 32 points, his brother recalled. “The bigger the challenge, the better he responded,” Jamie said.

He graduated from high school in June 1989 and enlisted eight weeks later.

Rhonda knew Jeff wanted to be a SEAL but “I wasn't quite excited about that,” she said. They put his career first.

He entered Basic Underwater Demolition/SEAL school, where just one in five men complete the brutal training. The school starts the transformation of top young sailors into highly skilled amphibious warriors.

Jeff graduated from Class 191. From the SEAL base in Coronado, Calif., he deployed regularly around the globe – Sri Lanka, Philippines and Kosovo.

Deployment often came with little notice. She heard brief sketches of perilous operations and training. He shrugged off the danger.

When a helicopter Jeff was in crashed into a ship during training, his brother remembers Jeff's reaction: "Aw, it was just a hard landing."

He was rarely home. Rhonda learned to stifle her concerns.

"It's hard to comprehend what your husband's doing," she said.

Six years ago, they moved to the East Coast. Soon, the family settled in a comfortable home near the Chesapeake Bay. The neighborhood's thick pine canopy reminded the couple of the Northwest.

Rhonda kept the finances, paid the bills, scheduled the family vacations. She runs her own pet-sitting business.

She built the scrapbooks: Jeff diving on a tropical island vacation, wearing a thong and fins as a prank. On the ground at night in Kosovo, behind his rifle, with a small mutt perched on his back. In front of a helicopter with buddies. At the hospital, cradling his newborn son.

He shielded her from his work, she said. He liked her to take on responsibilities. "Jeff needed me to be an independent woman," she said.

If she allowed her fear to rise, she said, "I wouldn't sleep at night. I wouldn't be able to pick up my child at day care."

Jeff's work mounted with the invasions of Afghanistan and Iraq.

Deployment pace was intense – six months on, six months off, Rhonda said. Even when Jeff was stateside, he usually was training somewhere around the country.

Jeff tried out for a particular SEAL team based at Dam Neck in Virginia Beach, Rhonda said. He collapsed during summer drills. His body temperature rose to 105 degrees. He fell into a coma for three days. It was the most serious incident in his SEAL career. Until June 28.

He was golfing on a clear day in early April when the Navy ordered him overseas. He and the other SEALs had two days to get ready and go.

The deployment would last until October. Part would be spent in Afghanistan, part in Germany. It was Jeff's first deployment to the Middle East.

"He was ready to go," Rhonda said. "He could not wait to get over there and fight the fight."

Jeff called his wife several times in the days leading up to the last mission. Enough, she finally told him. She had work to do.

Three weeks ago on a Tuesday night, Rhonda got a call from a close friend, another SEAL wife. The friend heard that a helicopter went down in Afghanistan. The news ricocheted around the insular SEAL community.

The next day, the phones crackled with facts and rumors. Her husband did not call. Rhonda cried all day.

That afternoon, casualty officers began to visit homes. Rhonda waited. By 5 p.m., they reached her door.

“It was like watching somebody else’s movie. Officers in dress blues ... I still don’t believe ...”

She paused. “Sometimes I think he’s going to come out,” she said.

Family flew in from across the country. Her estranged father and half-brother called. The governor left two phone messages.

Seth asked questions: Why didn’t he jump? Did other daddies die? How long will he be dead?

Family members said they were told the battle was heavy and bloody.

Sixteen special operations forces, including the eight SEALs, had volunteered to fly in broad daylight to rescue four SEALs who were on a reconnaissance mission. The four men were pinned down by Taliban and al-Qa ida fighters.

The helicopter flew high into the rugged terrain. Enemy fire, possibly a rocket-propelled grenade, brought the aircraft down, killing everyone on board. The dead included six SEALs based in Hampton Roads. One SEAL on the ground survived.

Pat Lucas believes her son dropped more than his share of enemy fighters before he died. “This was the end,” she said. “God called him home.”

A week after a memorial ceremony at Little Creek, the Lucas home was still filled with family. A small box of tissues sat on the coffee table.

Rhonda thought about her husband, and looked into space. She swore at him. Hard. Then she smiled. Shook her head.

“You think you’ve got it all planned,” Rhonda said. “You don’t.”

Jeff Lucas left these instructions in case he died: Cremate my body. Bury me at Arlington. No (expletive) bagpipes at my funeral.

The rest, he wrote, my wife knows.

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The Oregonian

Mourners remember dream of boy who became a SEAL

Jeffrey Lucas, killed June 28 in Afghanistan, grew up near Corbett with his heart set on a military profession

Sunday, August 28, 2005

YUXING ZHENG

GRESHAM -- It was obvious from an early age.

A report Jeffrey Lucas wrote in the fourth grade detailed his dream of becoming a Navy SEAL, describing the elite team as "the best." He honed his extraordinary accuracy by shooting squirrels and picking off mice. The walls in his room always had space for military recruitment posters. And when "Top Gun" came out, he dragged his friend to the movie theater.

"He was made to be a Navy SEAL," that longtime friend, pastor Ben Bryson, said Saturday.

Jeffrey Alan Lucas, 33, died with 15 other soldiers and sailors June 28 when a rocket-propelled grenade struck his Special Operations helicopter in Afghanistan. He leaves behind his wife, Rhonda, and their 4-year-old son, Seth, who live in Virginia Beach, Va.

Saturday's memorial at East Hill Foursquare Church in Gresham was the first Oregon gathering since his death two months ago. A memorial service was held last month in Virginia for Lucas and the others. Lucas will be buried Oct. 21 in Arlington National Cemetery, said Pat Lucas, his mother.

Gov. Ted Kulongoski told the crowd of more than 300 mourners that he wished he had known the "genuine American hero" he described as tenacious, courageous and intelligent.

"Petty Officer Jeffrey A. Lucas had the heart," Kulongoski said. "He wouldn't back down. He wouldn't give up."

Many speakers said they admired Lucas' commitment to his country.

"Jeff knew the profession was dangerous, but he understood that, and he did it anyway," his uncle, Larry Traxler, said. "Jeff was in Afghanistan for his love of freedom."

Three video tributes, with footage from the Corbett Fourth of July parade, Afghanistan and the July 8 memorial in Virginia, left many in the audience grasping for tissues to wipe away tears.

In the lobby afterward, they pored over photographs of the brown-haired Lucas as a young boy, on the varsity football team and as a rugged Navy SEAL.

Jamie Lucas said he took his older brother's death "very, very hard."

"There's times when I'm doing something in the yard, and I'll remember something Jeff did," said Jamie Lucas, fighting back tears. "It's probably what it'll be like in the next few months and years, but you just got to go on."

Lucas grew up a country boy at heart on his family's farm near Corbett, next door to his grandparents. He graduated in 1989 from Corbett High School, where he was a star in football, basketball, baseball, and track and field. He was an all-state tailback in football and joined the military after his senior year.

His mother said Saturday she finds peace knowing her son died doing what he loved.

"We can all be very proud of him," Pat Lucas said. "He did what he was chosen to do, what he wanted to do, and he did it well. Lots of us live until we die and just go through the motions, but he really lived."

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The Oregonian

Corbett plays to honor graduate killed in Afghanistan

Before its opener against Gaston, the team will retire the No. 44 jersey of Jeffrey Lucas, a Navy SEAL
Friday, September 09, 2005

JEFF SMITH

On the back of Corbett's helmets this season -- positioned inside a football and above an emblem of the American flag -- is the number 44.

That was the number worn by Jeffrey Lucas when he was a speedy tailback for Corbett High School before graduating in 1989.

Rather than pursue a college football career, Lucas achieved a childhood dream of becoming a Navy SEAL. His life ended June 28 while on a rescue mission in Afghanistan when the helicopter he was riding in was shot down apparently by a rocket-propelled grenade, killing him and 15 others.

Corbett football coach Roy Altman, whose family shares a close friendship with Lucas' family, felt Lucas deserved to be honored by the school's athletic program.

So before tonight's 7 p.m. kickoff of Corbett's season-opening game against visiting Gaston, Lucas' jersey will be retired in a ceremony that will include members of his family and many of his former classmates.

"It's going to be a pretty emotional night," Altman said.

Altman, a lifelong resident of the area, has countless memories and humorous stories of Lucas, who Altman coached in middle-school baseball and football.

Altman then turned into one of Lucas' biggest fans when Lucas was in high school, watching the 5-foot-9, 150-pounder excel in football, basketball and baseball and track and field.

"He was an overachiever his whole life," said Altman, whose children attended school with Lucas. "He lived for the challenge. The bigger the challenge, the better he was."

A season-opening football game is typically charged with adrenaline, and tonight's game will have added meaning because of the closeness of the small community that grieves together for Lucas.

"The biggest challenge is going to be keeping these kids' emotions in check," Altman said. "But like Jeff's brother Jamie said, 'If you want to honor Jeff, play like Jeff did and that's all out.' "