

Airmen to walk 800 miles in memorial march for fallen from Bragg

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(October 15) -- A group of air commandos will march more than 800 miles - from San Antonio to the Florida panhandle - to honor three Fort Bragg airmen who died in August.

Tech. Sgt. John W. Brown, Staff Sgt. Andrew Harvell and Tech. Sgt. Daniel L. Zerbe were killed Aug. 6 when their Chinook helicopter was shot down in Afghanistan's Wardak province.

The trio were among 30 U.S. service members - including Navy SEALs - killed in what was the deadliest single incident for the U.S. military during the war in Afghanistan.

Brown, Harvell and Zerbe were all members of the 24th Special Tactics Squadron, an Air Force Special Operations Command unit based at Pope Field.

The third annual Tim Davis Memorial March will begin Sunday at Lackland Air Force Base, Texas, according to a release from Air Force Special Operations Command.

The march, which will involve 18 air commandos, is set to end Oct. 26 at Hurlburt Field, Fla.

Teams of three marchers will take turns, averaging about 12.5 miles per leg, AFSOC spokeswoman Maj. Kristi Beckman said.

Each team will walk about 144 miles during the journey. Each team member will carry a 50-pound ruck sack.

Chief Master Sgt. Tony Negrón, stationed at Langley Air Force Base, Va., will be participating in the march for the first time.

Negrón said he knew Zerbe and also has connections to at least two other airmen who have been killed in action since 2001.

"The [AFSOC] community is so small, you get to know everyone and their families pretty intimately," he said. "This is a way to pay respect to those guys."

Negrón said the march would be an emotional one, but said there was nothing he would rather do.

Beckman said the march honors all 17 Air Force Special Operators who have died in Afghanistan or Iraq in the past decade, but only Zerbe, Harvell and Brown will be honored with special engraved batons that will be carried by the marchers.

The march will continue around the clock, passing through Texas, Louisiana, Mississippi, Alabama and Florida before all 18 marchers unite with surviving family members of the 17 fallen airmen, wounded warriors and others for the final 4.6 miles of the trek.

One of the event organizers, retired Chief Master Sgt. Steven Haggett, said airmen would collect donations for the Special Operations Warrior Foundation along the way.

The charity provides a college education to the family of Special Operations service members who are killed in action, he said.

Last year, Haggett said he participated in the march and called it difficult, but not impossible.

"Most people can march 12 miles," he said. "It's doing it every day that is hard."

Haggett said he doesn't know of any airman not being able to finish the memorial march.

Earlier this week, military investigators finished a probe of the crash that killed the three airmen. The investigation concluded that a Taliban-fired rocket-propelled grenade caused the crash and determined that military officials played no role in the deaths.

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For more information about the Walk, visit www.specialopswalk.com