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### **Night Stalker receives Distinguished Service Cross**

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160th Special Operations Aviation Regiment Public Affairs

FORT CAMPBELL, Ky. (USASOC News Service, July 14, 2008) – Chief Warrant Officer 5 David F. Cooper became the first Night Stalker in the unit's history and the only living aviator to receive the Distinguished Service Cross in support of the War on Terror during a ceremony on July 11 at Fort Campbell, Ky.

"We stand here today in awe of Mr. Cooper," said Adm. Eric T. Olson, commander, U.S. Special Operations Command, who presented the medal. "His actions read like adventure fiction, but they are real. Others live because of his selfless courage."

Cooper was the AH-6 Little Bird flight lead for a mission against a foreign fighter facilitator in central Iraq on November 27, 2006. While moving between waiting locations on this mission, his wingman was shot down by enemy fire. The helicopter assault force immediately landed and, along with the special operations ground forces onboard, set up a small perimeter around the crashed aircraft. Although there were no serious injuries, the aircraft was not flyable.

After confirming that there was no immediate threat to the assault force position, the two Black Hawk helicopters of the formation, carrying the pilots from the downed aircraft, returned to their base to get a downed aircraft recovery team.

This left the force of about 20 special operations forces at the crash site with one mission capable AH-6 and two MH-6 helicopters. The crash site was flat desert ground, leaving the troops nowhere to find cover while defending the area.

About 40 minutes following the crash, enemy personnel suddenly appeared and began firing on their position. At this time, Cooper and his co-pilot were already starting up their engines to get an aerial view of the situation. Immediately upon taking off, Cooper's aircraft became the target for enemy fire. Cooper flew his helicopter directly into the enemy fire, attacking the enemy positions and diverting fire away from the ground forces.

He landed his helicopter near the crash site twice during the engagement, where his fellow pilots downloaded ammunition and fuel from the crashed Little Bird and transferred it to his. These actions kept Cooper's aircraft in the fight for as long as possible. After a third series of aerial gunnery attacks, the enemy personnel finally ceased firing and fled the area.

Lt. Gen. Robert W. Wagner, commander, U.S. Army Special Operations Command, described Cooper's actions that day as seemingly impossible.

"Imagine what would have happened had (Cooper) not defied all odds and heroically flown into a heavily armed gauntlet attracting fire to himself in order to divert deadly enemy fire from his teammates and then most courageous and heroically, rearming and refueling on-site to continue the fight," he said. "Unbelievable courage, brilliant presence of mind, selfless saving acts under the most demanding combat conditions, (he is) a true hero in every sense of the word."

Olson described Cooper's actions as representative of all Night Stalkers, a testament to the unit's motto 'Night Stalkers Don't Quit.'

"Operating most often as members of an aircraft joint team, you are the ideal teammates," he said. "Many of your casualties have been suffered after making the conscious and deliberate decision to fly into a hot landing zone to save troops on the ground who have no other hope. To this unit the loyalty of the ground and maritime forces...is deep and forever."

During closing remarks, Cooper credited many people for doing their job and making his actions on the battlefield possible. He thanked the Soldiers, civilians and contractors of the 160th who got him onto the battlefield at the right place, at the right time, with the right amount of ammo and fuel. He also thanked his family and friends for their unwavering support of his career.

Cooper did not forget those Night Stalkers who were on the battlefield with him, as he thanked them for working together that day. He described the Little Bird pilots on the ground and his co-pilot as the real heroes.

"As those (pilots) were taking out ammunition and loading my helicopter with ammunition, loading my helicopter with fuel, they were in absolute plain sight of a determined enemy who was hell-bent to kill them and yet they did not quit," Cooper stated. "And it is to them that I am lucky enough to be standing here today, that (all of us from that day) are."

(My co-pilot) did a phenomenal job that day pointing out targets, working the radio and arming and de-arming me," he continued. "Again, without him, none of this would be possible."

Cooper's co-pilot was previously presented the Silver Star and the four MH-6 pilots with Bronze Star Medals for Valor for their actions that day.

In the true quiet professional manner that the Night Stalkers live by, Cooper said he was humbled by receiving this award.

“I accept it on behalf of all Night Stalkers, past, present and future,” he said. More than 500 people were in attendance during the ceremony, including about 100 of Cooper’s family members from the Cincinnati, Ohio, area. His younger sister Karen Bishop was among them.

Before today, she said the family knew a few details beyond what Cooper had called “a really tough day” after the incident occurred. The story that Cooper had relayed involved not just his actions, but those of his fellow Night Stalkers and special operations forces who worked together under intense combat circumstances.

“It is a really special day for our family,” she said. “Growing up, Dave was always a leader. He’s been a leader in our family and obviously he’s a leader with his comrades and his troops. And we’re just proud of him.”

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Chief Warrant Officer 5 David F. Cooper is presented the Distinguished Service Cross (DSC) from Admiral Eric T. Olson, commander of United States Special Operations Command, during a ceremony at Fort Campbell, Ky., on July 11, 2008. The DSC is the Army’s second highest award for combat valor and is awarded for gallantry in action against an enemy of the United States during military operations. Cooper is a 160th Special Operations Aviation Regiment AH-6 Little helicopter pilot. (160th Special Operations Aviation Regiment Photo)



Chief Warrant Officer 5 David F. Cooper makes remarks after being presented the Distinguished Service Cross (DSC) during a ceremony at Fort Campbell, Ky., on July 11, 2008. The DSC is the Army’s second highest award for combat valor and is awarded for gallantry in action against an enemy of the United States during military operations. Cooper is a 160th Special Operations Aviation Regiment AH-6 Little helicopter pilot. (160th Special Operations Aviation Regiment Photo)