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“Who is your most admired Airpower Legend and why did you select that person?”

My most admired Airpower Legend is SrA Jason Cunningham. He was a Pararescueman assigned to the 38th Rescue Squadron at Moody AFB, GA. SrA Cunningham died on March 4, 2002 in Afghanistan on a rescue mission, Operation Anaconda, during Operation Enduring Freedom.

I was a supply troop before I retrained in 2004. I was stationed at Moody AFB at the 347th Supply Squadron. During that time, I worked with a SrA Washington. When the 38th Rescue Squadron was reactivated at Moody in May of 2001, they needed supply members to go work in their unit to order their equipment. SrA Washington was my friend and mentor and she was picked for this job. I would visit her often and spent plenty of time around the PJ's. I met and got to know a few of them. SrA Washington would sometimes use the PJ's when they weren't training to move equipment around and help organize the warehouse they had to house all of their gear. Whenever I visited, SrA Cunningham seemed to be there. He was a fairly new PJ, but not new to the military as he was prior Navy. He was nice, funny, outgoing, and genuinely a good person. He loved his family, his job, and the Air Force. We would spend so much time in that warehouse talking and laughing. One day, we talked so much that I never went back to work after lunch, he missed a training, and SrA Washington missed a doctor's appointment. All 3 of us got in trouble...not real trouble. I was there when they did their first C-130 jump on the fight line to commensurate the reactivation of the unit, and I was invited to all of their squadron events. The PJ's are a truly a family, day in and day out.

When you join the military you know there is a possibility that you can lose a friend, co-worker, subordinate, or supervisor. You try not to think about it. When I received the news of his passing from SrA Washington, I assumed a car accident or something of that nature. I never thought in a million years, even though I was deployed at the time myself, it would be to the enemy. It's not a feeling I would ever want to relive.

I selected SrA Jason Cunningham as my Airpower Legend not because he's in the PDG as a decorated Airman, not because he was awarded the Air Force cross posthumously, not because he was the first Pararescueman since the Vietnam War to be killed in battle, but because he didn't cave under pressure his first time in combat. He died doing what he loved, while in the process of saving 10 other service members and tending to their wounds even though, he himself, was bleeding out. He continued care until another medic came to tend to him and the others.

Jason will always be remembered. There have been: books written about his battle, numerous articles, a Facebook page dedicated to his honor, his wife still serves, and talks of him receiving the Medal of Honor in the future. There is a schoolhouse named after him at Moody AFB, Georgia and a Basic Training Facility at Lackland AFB, Texas. This is why he is my Airpower Legend. In closing, I'll honor my Wingman as he rests peacefully with the Pararescueman motto, “That Others May Live.”