

# Four killed in copter crash had N.C. ties

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**BY TOM BREEN**

The Associated Press

RALEIGH — The four U.S. military personnel with North Carolina ties who died in a helicopter crash in Afghanistan all belonged to elite units renowned for the skill and dedication of their members.

Three of those killed were airmen assigned to the 24th Special Tactics Squadron at Pope Field, and the fourth was a Navy SEAL from Jacksonville, according to a list released Thursday by the Department of Defense. They were killed last week with 26 other U.S. military service members and eight Afghans when their Chinook helicopter was downed by a rocket-propelled grenade fired by a Taliban insurgent.

The airmen were Tech.

Sgt. John W. Brown, 33, of Tallahassee, Fla.; Staff Sgt. Andrew W. Harvell, 26, of Long Beach, Calif.; and Tech. Sgt. Daniel L. Zerbe, 28, of York, Pa. The three belonged to a unit at the facility known as Pope Air Force Base until it merged with nearby Fort Bragg earlier this year. That came as part of a national realignment of military resources aimed at improving efficiency.

The Navy SEAL was Christopher Campbell, 36, whose family in Jacksonville disclosed his death earlier this week. Campbell was one of 22 SEALs killed in the crash.

While not as prominent as the elite SEALs whose members killed Al Qaeda mastermind Osama bin Laden this year, the unit that Brown, Harvell and Zerbe belonged to also is renowned for its rigor and skill.

Handpicked after joining the Air Force, candidates for the Special Tactics Squadron must successfully complete three years of arduous training before they can be assigned a unit, according to retired Air Force

Col. John Carney.

“Out of 100 people who go into that rigorous training, maybe 10 of them will make it out,” said Carney, who is credited with creating the special tactics units in the 1980s.

Special tactics airmen have one of three specialties: combat weather teams, pararescuemen who serve as front-line combat medics and combat controllers, who coordinate air support in battle to “put steel on targets,” Carney said.

“Essentially, they’re running an air traffic control field out of their rucksack,” he said.

Family members of Harvell and Zerbe declined to speak when contacted Thursday, but Brown’s mother, Elizabeth Newlun, earlier said that her son, a pararescueman, was a “gentle giant” who loved anything physical or athletic.

Zerbe, who graduated in 2001 from Red Lion Area Senior High School in Pennsylvania, was hailed by his former school district as a model worth emulating.

“Dan wanted to make a

difference in the world, so he joined the military,” Superintendent Scott Deisley said in a statement. “Dan Zerbe was a true American hero.”