

A HERO FROM THE SKY

Staff Sergeant Clifford “Dylan” Crawford was honored as the *Air Force Times* Airman of the Year for his bravery and heroism

Written by Meagan Clanahan

The world watched in horror as a magnitude 7.8 earthquake devastated the country of Nepal last April, killing almost 9,000 people and injuring over 22,000. Staff Sergeant Clifford Crawford was one of the only pararescuemen available. He immediately raised his hand to go on a massive search and rescue mission saving 44 people.

A DREAM FULFILLED

Crawford realized around his junior year of high school that military life was his passion. “It was all I could think about,” Crawford says. He channeled that innate desire to both serve and be involved in medical assistance into training, becoming a certified emergency medical technician before graduating high school. Pararescue, an elite troop that makes up the smallest special operations crew in the Air Force with only 400 total actives, and requires almost three years of high-intensity training to graduate from the program, was the perfect fit for Crawford. He was already well entrenched in the Air Force when, through his sister’s work connections, he met Katyite Kara Schuberth, who attended Taylor High School and received her Bachelor’s degree in nursing from the University of Oklahoma. The Crawfords have since settled in Okinawa, Japan where they expect to remain for at least the next two years.

THAT FATEFUL DAY

Because of the isolated mountainous regions centered around the Gorkha region of Nepal, rescue and recovery efforts were harrowing. In many cases, the only way to reach the deceased and injured was via air. That’s where Crawford’s special expertise came in. The “PJs”, as the pararescue are referred to, are specifically trained to jump

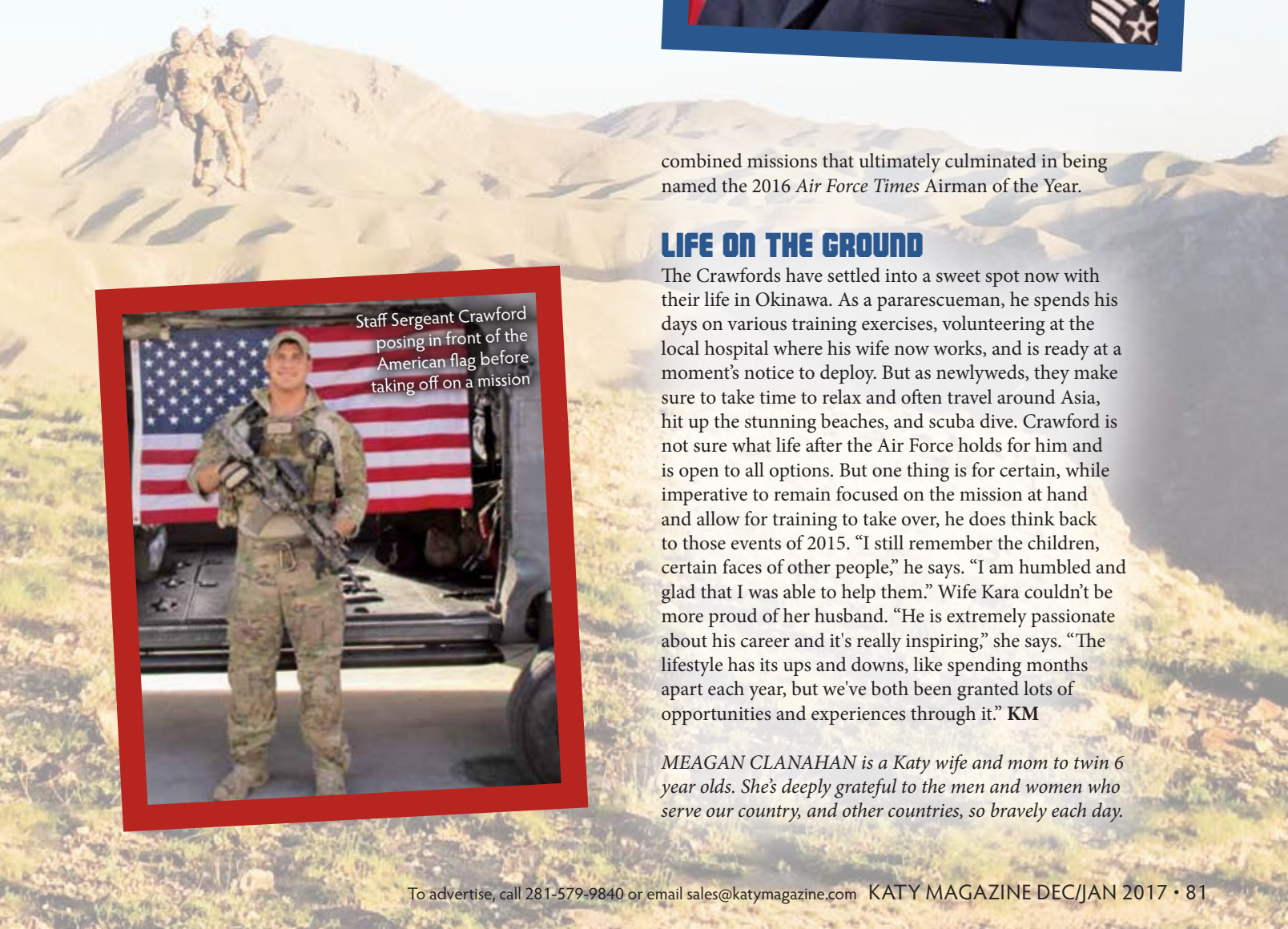
out of the Osprey helicopters into the remote villages, administering aid, triaging to the best of their ability, and then arranging for transport to medical facilities. “We spent about two-and-a-half weeks treating the injured,” Crawford says. “It was basically going in and using all of our medical skills, everything we had trained for, helping everyone from children to the very old.” All told, Sgt. Crawford was credited with saving 44 Nepalese who certainly would have perished without his assistance.

TRAGEDY STRIKES AGAIN

Just less than a month later, a series of aftershocks and another major quake shook the region. Then a military helicopter carrying Marines, Nepalese soldiers, and a handful of injured civilians, crashed into a remote mountainside. Crawford was once again deployed with three other PJs and Nepalese rangers to recover the remains of the crew members and Nepal citizens. While not only trying to find the downed copter, he continued with his mission of treating and evacuating earthquake victims. “Conditions were pretty sketchy,” Crawford states. From dealing with horribly cold weather, fending off snow leopards, and managing landslides from the continued aftershocks, he remained focused on his mission, remaining on the mountainside for four long days. It was his impressive skills and fortitude with those



Staff Sergeant Clifford Crawford in his dress uniform



combined missions that ultimately culminated in being named the 2016 *Air Force Times* Airman of the Year.

LIFE ON THE GROUND

The Crawfords have settled into a sweet spot now with their life in Okinawa. As a pararescueman, he spends his days on various training exercises, volunteering at the local hospital where his wife now works, and is ready at a moment's notice to deploy. But as newlyweds, they make sure to take time to relax and often travel around Asia, hit up the stunning beaches, and scuba dive. Crawford is not sure what life after the Air Force holds for him and is open to all options. But one thing is for certain, while imperative to remain focused on the mission at hand and allow for training to take over, he does think back to those events of 2015. "I still remember the children, certain faces of other people," he says. "I am humbled and glad that I was able to help them." Wife Kara couldn't be more proud of her husband. "He is extremely passionate about his career and it's really inspiring," she says. "The lifestyle has its ups and downs, like spending months apart each year, but we've both been granted lots of opportunities and experiences through it." KM

MEAGAN CLANAHAN is a Katy wife and mom to twin 6 year olds. She's deeply grateful to the men and women who serve our country, and other countries, so bravely each day.



Staff Sergeant Crawford posing in front of the American flag before taking off on a mission