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## Texas A&M Student Carries On Father's Legacy After Helicopter Crash On Campus Claimed His Life

Texas A&M University student Caitlyn Mitts says the feeling is bittersweet whenever she passes by Duncan Field, a grassy area on the south side of campus where the Corps of Cadets drills. It was there on Jan. 12, 2009 at about 3 p.m. that a Black Hawk helicopter flying a training mission crashed shortly after takeoff. Five people were inside the chopper when it went down, including Mitts' father, 42-year-old Army National Guard Staff Sergeant Charles Mitts, who died from his injuries at a Houston hospital two days later.

"Every day I pass by Duncan Field and it's difficult, but it gets easier with time," Mitts says. "It's a constant reminder of all the amazing things my father achieved during his life. He sacrificed everything, not only for me but for his country."

Charles Mitts was from Killeen and began his career as a police officer, later joining the Army and the Army Reserves, says his daughter, who was 16 when he was killed. "He became an air marshal and also worked with the FBI in counter terrorism. He was deployed to Iraq twice and was a crew chief for Black Hawk helicopter missions."

Her father was in College Station that day working with the Air National Guard, training cadets, when the helicopter came down. "My father and Cadet Zachary Cook were on the side of the helicopter that hit the ground. Zachary died immediately on impact and my father was taken away with severe brain injuries," Mitts explains. "Zachary had just graduated from Texas A&M the month before the accident."

The two pilots and remaining passenger survived the crash.

Mitts, now 21, is a junior bioenvironmental science major from Houston and says she plans to follow in her father's footsteps by working for the FBI as a forensic scientist.

This fall, Mitts was awarded a \$3,000 scholarship from ThanksUSA, a non-profit organization providing scholarships to the children and spouses of U.S. service men and women. ThanksUSA has awarded more than 3,000 scholarships nationwide totaling almost \$10 million since 2005.



Staff Sergeant Charles Mitts, photographed just moments before the helicopter crash that claimed his life. "This is my favorite picture of him," says his daughter, Caitlyn.

"I have received scholarships from them since my freshman year in college," notes Mitts, who flew to Washington, D.C. last month to accept the honor. "I received this scholarship in memory of Army Cpl. Tomas Sotelo Jr. of Houston, who was killed in action at the age of 22 after his vehicle was hit by an IED in Baghdad in 2003. I'm very grateful for these scholarships as they have helped me to attend college and reach my dream."

Mitts says she has received help and encouragement from many Aggies over the years, including Cook's uncle, Don Roper, Texas A&M Class of '75. "He has been like family to me and has helped me with everything as far as school goes," says Mitts. "What I love most about Texas A&M is being a part of the Aggie family and all the support that's given me through the years. I feel so connected with the school since my dad's accident happened here."

Mitts says she is grateful for the support she's received from the Aggie family.



Mitts says she's proud of her father's many accomplishments in service to the nation including his winning the FBI's Robert Mueller Directors Award for Excellence, as well as serving as personal escort for General David Petraeus in Iraq.

She shares one of the things she misses most about her dad: his constant encouragement. "He encouraged me to do everything I possibly can to achieve all my goals. I still learn from him every day by remembering that he did everything he ever dreamed of. He was an all-around hero and gave his life for our country."



(from left:) Caitlyn Mitts, Benanca Sotelo, mother of Tomas Sotelo Jr., and Col. Lanier Ward, commander of the 11th Armored Cavalry Regiment at the ThanksUSA Gala in Washington, D.C. last month