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DEPARTMENT OF DEFENSE  
SPECIAL OPERATIONS JOINT TASK FORCE - AFGHANISTAN  
BAGRAM AIRFIELD, AFGHANISTAN  
APO AE 09354

NSOCC-A/SOJTF-A-J35

19 August 2018

MEMORANDUM FOR Commanding General, Special Operations Joint Task Force-Afghanistan (SOJTF-A), Afghanistan, APO, AE 09354

SUBJECT: (U//~~FOUO~~) Findings and Recommendations, Army Regulation (AR) 15-6 Investigation – Death of SFC Christopher Celiz in Zurmat, Paktiya Province, Afghanistan on 12 July 2018

1. (U) References.

a. (U) Memorandum of Appointment, dated 13 July 2018 (U)

b. (U) Army Regulation (AR) 15-6, Procedures for Administrative Investigations and Boards of Officers (U)

2. ~~(S//REL USA FVEY)~~ Background. On 13 July 2018, I was appointed by the SOJTF-A Commanding General as an investigating officer pursuant to AR 15-6. The purpose of the investigation was to determine the facts and circumstances surrounding the death of Sergeant First Class (SFC) Christopher A. Celiz during combat operations on 12 July 2018 in the vicinity of Zurmat, Paktiya Province, Afghanistan.

3. ~~(S//REL to USA, FVEY)~~ Summary. On 12 July 2018 during <sup>(b)(1)1.4a</sup> Friendly Forces <sup>(b)(1)1.4a</sup> and Partner Forces) <sup>(b)(1)1.4a</sup> arrived at the vehicle drop-off location to clear a nearby compound. While conducting <sup>(b)(1)1.4a</sup> dismounted clearance of building D1080, a member of the Afghan partner force was wounded by small arms fire. During the MEDEVAC of the partner force, SFC Celiz was also wounded by small arms fire. Both casualties were evacuated to <sup>(b)(1)1.4a</sup> care at FOB Dahlke. SFC Celiz expired while in surgery at FOB Dahlke Role II.

4. ~~(S//REL to USA, FVEY)~~ Overview. I was officially notified of my appointment on 13 July 2018. I began to gather and compile background data from 14 July and received my legal briefing on the same day. Due to my current location next to Camp Alpha, I was able to make contact with TF J3 in order to make contact with SFC Celiz's team members from the operation. I acquired the Zurmat CONOP through the appropriate SOJTF-A channels to have a better understanding of the overall mission, enemy situation, and Coalition assets supporting the mission. Due to <sup>(b)(1)1.4a</sup> operational tempo, rest cycle, and concurrent <sup>(b)(1)1.4a</sup> tempo, I was unable to make it down to their forward location. All communication and gathering of information for the investigation was pushed through SIPR email and phone conversations. On 14 July I made contact with <sup>(b)(3) 10 USC 130b/(b)(6)</sup> regarding my duties <sup>(b)(3) 10 USC 130b/(b)(6)</sup> directed me towards <sup>(b)(3) 10 USC 130b/(b)(6)</sup> 15 July <sup>(b)(3) 10 USC 130b/(b)(6)</sup> directed me to the <sup>(b)(1)1.4a</sup> Team

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(b)(3) 10 USC 130b/(b)(6) From 15 to 17 July I was in constant contact with (b)(3) 10 USC 130b/(b)(6) (b)(3) 10 USC 130b/(b)(6) phone and email. On 17 July I received my initial sworn statements from one of SFC Celiz's team members during the operation. The TF operators included: (b)(3) 10 USC 130b/(b)(6) SFC Celiz, (b)(3) 10 USC 130b/(b)(6) I submitted my draft findings and recommendations on 11 August. I received edits from my legal advisor on 12 August, and re-submitted my report on 14 August. From the 15-19 August I was asked to get statements from the other two members of SFC Celiz's team, as well as develop a graphic depicting the engagement.

#### 5. ~~(S//REL TO USA, FVEY)~~ Summary of Relevant & Material Facts.

a. (U) Personnel Directly Involved at the Time of the Incident. Below are SFC Celiz's team members that participated in the 12 July 18 Zurmat operation.

(1) (U//FOUO) (b)(3) 10 USC 130b/(b)(6) for (b)(1)1.4a TM2, and was the (b)(3) 10 USC 130b/(b)(6) for TM2 on 12 July 2018. (b)(3) 10 USC 130b/(b)(6) with (b)(3) 10 USC 130b/(b)(6) assigned to the 75th Ranger Regiment. He has been on five combat deployments to Afghanistan. The first three deployments, he held the position of (b)(3) 10 USC 130b/(b)(6). Prior to this deployment he served as the (b)(3) 10 USC 130b/(b)(6) (b)(1)1.4a This deployment he has been on 25 missions spreading across Khowst, Paktiya, Paktika, and Jowzjan. For this operation, he and his team were on mission for no less than 30 hours on the southern objective area.

(2) (U//FOUO) (b)(3) 10 USC 130b/(b)(6) for (b)(1)1.4a TM2, and was the (b)(3) 10 USC 130b/(b)(6) for TM2 on 12 July 2018. (b)(3) 10 USC 130b/(b)(6) in the Army. He has (b)(3) 10 USC 130b/(b)(6) assigned to the 75th Ranger Regiment. He has been on two combat deployments to Afghanistan. The first he held the position of (b)(3) 10 USC 130b/(b)(6) for (b)(1)1.4a This deployment he has been on 20 missions spreading across Khowst, Paktiya, Paktika, and Jowzjan. For this operation, he and his team were on mission for no less than 30 hours on the southern objective area.

(3) (U//FOUO) (b)(3) 10 USC 130b/(b)(6) for (b)(1)1.4a TM2, and was the (b)(3) 10 USC 130b/(b)(6) for TM2 on 12 July 2018. (b)(3) 10 USC 130b/(b)(6) with (b)(3) 10 USC 130b/(b)(6) months in the army. He has (b)(3) 10 USC 130b/(b)(6) assigned to the 75th Ranger Regiment. He has been on one combat deployment to Afghanistan. This deployment he has been on 20 missions spreading across Khowst, Paktiya, Paktika, and Jowzjan. For this operation he and his team were on mission for no less than 30 hours on the southern objective area.

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b. (~~S//REL TO USA, FVEY~~) Concept of Operation. The mission called for (b)(1)1.4a to conduct (b)(1)1.4a between 11-13 July 2018 in order to (b)(1)1.4a Afghan and Coalition Forces. TF requested approval to conduct this operation on Sahak Village located in Zurmat District, Paktiya Province. According to the (b)(1)1.4c Sahak Village, and surrounding villages, had historical Taliban (TB) and Haqqani (HQN) militant activity associated with TB commander (b)(1)1.4a and TB/HQN facilitator (b)(1)1.4a (b)(1)1.4a. The area had been used to support attacks against the Zurmat district center and militant operations into Gardez. (b)(1)1.4a operation would demonstrate friendly forces' ability to project and maintain security in the area (b)(1)1.4a (b)(1)1.4a (See exhibit D).

c. (~~S//REL TO USA, FVEY~~) Narrative. After the element provided over watch on their second Named Area of Interest (NAI), SFC Celiz's team, along with the partnered force, came under a large volume of effective machine gun and sniper fire from various compounds to their north. A member of SFC Celiz's team was notified that a partnered force member had been wounded during the initial contact with the enemy. The team immediately returned fire towards the enemy's known and likely positions in the vicinity of the building designated "D990" as the team sought cover from enemy fire. SFC Celiz decided to split his four man team into two elements. One element provide suppressive fire to likely and known enemy targets, while SFC Celiz took his team (b)(1)1.4a (b)(3) 10 USC 130b(b)(6) to the vehicle in order to prep the (b)(1)1.4a SFC Celiz exposed himself to enemy fire, targeted the enemy structure 600m away, and neutralized the position with the recoilless rifle. SFC Celiz's team then bounded back to friendly forces, and SFC Celiz kept his team in separate elements. This would enable his team to provide initial aide to their wounded partner and prep him for MEDEVAC, while also providing cover fire. During the evacuation of the wounded partner, the element came under a high volume of enemy fire. SFC Celiz aided the wounded partner, moved back to a position with cover and continued to provide suppressive fire on the enemy, protecting friendly elements and the MEDEVAC helicopter. He was fatally wounded by small arms fire while bounding back to the MEDEVAC helicopter. The MEDEVAC helicopter had taken off once the partner force casualty was loaded, but was called back to evacuate SFC Celiz (b)(3) 10 USC 130b(b)(6) with assistance from two partner force Soldiers, re-exposed themselves to an enemy fire and carried SFC Celiz, loading him onto the MEDEVAC helicopter. The MEDEVAC then flew directly to the (b)(1)1.4a (See Exhibits A, B, C, & G).

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d. ~~(S//REL TO USA, FVEY)~~ There was no criminal intent, misconduct, or negligence on the part of any member of the patrol during the fire-fight with insurgents. On the contrary, SFC Celiz and his Rangers distinguished themselves under fire. SFC Celiz's team knew their mission, primary and secondary duties, as well as their contingency plan in case a team member was wounded due to enemy fire. SFC Celiz's team continued to shoot, move, and communicate while bounding back to covered positions in order to provide treatment to the wounded (b)(1)1.4a partner and to continue to suppress/neutralize enemy positions. (See Exhibits A, B, & C).

6. (U//~~FOUO~~) Findings. After carefully considering the evidence, I find the following:

a. ~~(S//REL USA, FVEY)~~ What was the nature of the mission? How was it developed, approved, and executed? This is addressed in para. 5(b). In short, the mission was to

(b)(1)1.4a

(b)(1)1.4a

(b)(1)1.4a

(b)(1)1.4a

(b)(1)1.4a

(b)(1)1.4a

(b)(1)1.4a

The mission was appropriately staffed and approved through SOJTF-A. This particular operation called for a GAF to the objective.

b. ~~(S//REL USA, FVEY)~~ How did the unit prepare for the mission, and what was their previous experience with missions of this kind? Describe any rehearsals, brief backs, and other preparations, and any relevant previous operations conducted by this force. Review of the unit members' individual experience is reviewed in para. 5(a). The unit prepared for the mission through

(b)(1)1.4a

(b)(1)1.4a

from previous operations, real time intelligence

(b)(1)1.4a

The unit conducted collective static and movement rehearsals.

c. ~~(S//REL USA, FVEY)~~ What rules of engagement, tactical guidance, tactical directives, or other operational orders governed the mission? Did the individuals involved in this incident comply with them? The following guidance and directives were in place at the time of the mission, and governed its execution: (1) the Standing Rules of Engagement (SROE); (2) the Operation Freedom's Sentinel ROE; (3) the United States Forces – Afghanistan (USFOR-A) Tactical Directive; and (4) the SOJTF-A Tactical Directive. SFC Celiz's team complied with all of them. Every member followed the current ROE and Tactical Directive.

d. ~~(S//REL USA, FVEY)~~ Describe in detail the facts and circumstances surrounding the incident; develop a timeline and detailed description of the terrain, buildings,

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vehicles, and general area where the incident occurred; if you believe it would be value added, create and reference a diagram or other visual aid to assist you with this description. On 12 July 2018, at roughly 0500 local, SFC Celiz's team began to take accurate and sustained machine gun and sniper fire. At the time, they were dismounted and clearing compounds of interest. The initial contact hit the driver's side window of their empty truck, not far from the team's location. The team for the next several minutes engaged the enemy from the vicinity of buildings D1080 and D1070, primarily from behind a dilapidated structure about five feet tall and eight feet long. During this engagement, the partner force took a casualty. SFC Celiz split his team, and took (b)(3) 10 USC 1305(b)(6) with him to retrieve the (b)(3) 10 USC 1305(b)(6) which he used to level the structure from which his team was taking fire. Displaying this initiative and exposing himself to hostile fire to engage the enemy with the recoilless rifle, neutralized the enemy and provided approximately 30 minutes to recover the casualty and call in MEDEVAC helicopters. Roughly upon the arrival of the MEDEVAC helicopters, the enemy fire resumed. SFC Celiz again exposed himself to enemy fire in order to cover the MEDEVAC's arrival, loading of the casualty, and departure. As the MEDEVAC departed, having spent only a few minutes on the ground, SFC Celiz was wounded by enemy small arms fire and fell. He tried to get up, only to collapse again, remaining unconscious. SFC Celiz's team and the partner forces maintained their fire on the enemy, while exposing themselves to recover SFC Celiz, who had been shot in the right flank, above his body armor. They called back the MEDEVAC, which landed again, and they loaded SFC Celiz into it, roughly three minutes after he was wounded. SFC Celiz arrived at FOB Dahlke roughly ten minutes after he was injured, where the (b)(1)1.4a tirelessly operated on him for approximately one hour and 40 minutes. After this effort, the surgeon determined SFC Celiz had expired. Attachment A to this report depicts where the firefight resulting in SFC Celiz's death took place.

e. ~~(S//REL USA, FVEY)~~ What were the causes and extent of SFC Celiz's injuries? SFC Celiz's injuries stemmed from effective/accurate enemy fire he received while bounding back, leaving his last covered position, as he provided a high volume of fire to protect his team, litter team, and MEDEVAC aircraft. SFC Celiz was shot as the MEDEVAC aircraft initially took off. He was hit on his right side (between the side plate and arm pit). The round entered his right side and traveled up towards his vital area near the heart. This single bullet caused the sum total of his injuries.

f. ~~(S//REL USA, FVEY)~~ What medical treatment, if any, was provided to SFC Celiz? Include specific details related to the medical assistance provided at the scene, details of the MEDEVAC process, including the timing of the request(s), when MEDEVAC assets arrived, and where the individuals were taken after the incident. No meaningful treatment or assessment was conducted on the ground (prior to MEDEVAC lift off) due

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to the tactical and enemy situation and the patient's condition, and the fact that MEDEVAC was already on the scene. The (b)(1)1.4a and three partner force Soldiers transferred his body to a litter and moved him onto the MEDEVAC helicopter. The element worked quickly and steadily as it took a total of 3 minutes from the time SFC Celiz was shot to boarding the helicopter. (See Exhibit B). SFC Celiz's team placed him on the litter with body armor and helmet removed. The MEDEVAC, which was in the process of leaving with the first wounded individual, was ordered and directed by the ground team to find a secondary landing zone in order to get SFC Celiz on board. SFC Celiz was immediately flown to Dahlke (b)(1)1.4a for treatment. SFC Celiz's initial care was being monitored by (b)(3) 10 USC 130b/(b)(6) SFC Celiz arrived at the Dahlke (b)(1)1.4a facility at 0610 on 12 July 2018. The surgeon (b)(3) 10 USC 130b/(b)(6) treated SFC Celiz for a gunshot wound to the right flank. The trauma team worked continuously on SFC Celiz for approximately 1 hour and 40 minutes until the surgeon called SFC Celiz expired at 0802hrs. (See Exhibit G). (b)(6)

(b)(6)

(b)(6) SFC Celiz never regained meaningful cardiac activity.

g. (~~S//REL USA, FVEY~~) What personal protective equipment did SFC Celiz wear at the time of his injuries? SFC Celiz was equipped in accordance with the (b)(1)1.4a policy regarding individual protective equipment: M4A1 (MOD) Rifle, (b)(1)1.4a side arm; (b)(1)1.4a Ballistic Helmet (b)(1)1.4a (hearing protection / communication); Ballistic Eyewear; (b)(1)1.4a (Night Vision Device); (b)(1)1.4a Plate carrier with front, back, and side ESAPI plates; tactical gloves, 2 x CAT Tourniquets; standard (b)(1)1.4a knee / elbow pad inserts.

h. (~~S//REL USA, FVEY~~) Was SFC Celiz's death incurred in the line of duty pursuant to AR 600-8-4? SFC Celiz was conducting (b)(1)1.4a offensive operations in support of Operating Freedom Sentinel. Considering the nature of his actions and the circumstances of his death, there can be no question that per AR 600-8-4, SFC Celiz's death was in the line of duty.

i. (~~S//REL USA, FVEY~~) What force protection techniques did U.S. forces and/or partner forces use during this particular operation and what air assets were assisting the unit at the time of contact? The U.S. and partner forces were executing operations in accordance with the OFS ROE. The current ROE are briefed during the mission brief

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back from the Commander down to the lowest levels. The force had an Air Weapons Team (AWT) of 2 x AH-64s and an F-16 in support of their operations.

j. ~~(S//REL USA, FVEY)~~ Was any of the SFC Celiz's hand-receipted military equipment destroyed or lost during the operation? SFC Celiz's individual military equipment i.e. individual weapon system, NVGs, radios, body armor, accompanied him on the MEDEVAC helicopter. Reviewing the sworn statements from SFC Celiz's team, nothing was mentioned about his hand receipted military equipment being lost or destroyed during the 12 July 2018 operation. If any was lost or destroyed, it should be classified as a combat loss.

k. ~~(S//REL USA, FVEY)~~ Any other matters pertaining to this incident that you deem relevant. SFC Celiz's actions during the 12 July 2018 Operation went above and beyond the call of duty in order to protect his team and his partner forces from being injured or killed by enemy small arms/machine gun fire.

7. ~~(S//REL USA, NATO, RSMA)~~ Recommendations. In view of the above findings, I recommend the following:

(b)(5)

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8. (U//~~FOUO~~) The point of contact for this memorandum is the undersigned at SVOIP:

(b)(3) 10 USC 130b/(b)(6)

(b)(3) 10 USC 130b/(b)(6)

Investigating Officer

1 Attachment:

1. Graphic of Engagement Area

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