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## *Security Assistance Community*

### **Major Neil Kringel, USAF, Awarded the Airman's Medal For Multiple Acts of Courage and Heroism**

By

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On December 13, 1999, at the USCENTCOM 1999 Security Assistance Conference, General A. C. Zinni, USMC, Commander, U.S. Central Command, awarded Major Neil Kringel the Airman's Medal for multiple acts of courage and heroism, without regard for his own life, following the terrorist attack on the United States Embassy, Nairobi, Kenya on August 7, 1998. Following what has been cataloged as the most devastating attack against an American diplomatic mission in United States history when over 250 people were killed (including 12 Americans) and over 5000 people were wounded, Major Kringel displayed uncommon presence of mind under extremely stressful circumstances, extreme courage, and is credited with saving numerous lives, while placing his own at risk.



General A. C. Zinni, USMC, Commander, U.S. Central Command, presents the Airman's Medal to Major Neal F. Kringel, USAF, for his heroism in the aftermath of the terrorist bombing of the American Embassy in Nairobi, Kenya.

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On August 7, 1998 the United States Embassy in Nairobi, Kenya was viciously attacked, without warning, by two explosions, the second of which is estimated to have been equal to 2500 pounds of TNT. The explosions were later attributed to a terrorist cell affiliated with international terrorist suspect, Osama Bin Laden. The crater created by the blast measured twenty feet deep and forty feet in diameter and was felt for miles. It devastated the embassy, caused an adjacent six-story building to collapse totally and another adjacent twenty-two-story building to permanently tilt by nearly a foot. The embassy's location, at one of the busiest intersections in a city of over two and one half million people, the proximity of surrounding structures, and size of the bomb, caused massive collateral damage and over 5000 casualties compounding the dangerous, chaotic situation and hindering rescue efforts.

Major Kringel, assigned as the training officer in the U.S.-Kenya Liaison Office (KUSLO), was attending the core country team meeting in the ambassador's office on the fourth floor. The second and larger of two explosions showered the meeting participants with shards of glass. Metal from the ceiling tile frames became razor-like shrapnel. Pieces of concrete, as heavy as two hundred pounds, were blown around corridors and rooms. Heavy smoke and dust filled the ambassador's office. Despite the chaos and carnage, Major Kringel kept his composure and began to methodically make his way toward the stairwell reassuring and leading those he encountered on the way to a safe exit from the crumbling, unstable, burning embassy. Crawling along the floor to get under the intense dust and smoke, Major Kringel came upon the open elevator shafts with the back wall blown away by the blast. The shaft was now open to the ground floor and offered no hope of escape from the dangerous building. Leading the group, Major Kringel continued through the perilous debris-choked hall until he located the stairwell. Finding the stairwell reasonably intact and safe, he sent this first group down the stairs to safety. Major Kringel then, without regard for his own safety, returned to areas where he had heard desperate cries for help coming from what once had been offices that had been on the back exterior wall and directly above the blast. With total disregard for his own life and safety, he entered the remains of the first office and began to probe through the heavy, unstable debris. The devastation was horrific. Rubble was piled six feet deep. Live, high voltage electrical wires hung from the ceiling and the walls. Entire interior walls had been blown away, adding to the disorientation and chaos. Working feverishly, in extremely hazardous conditions, he painstakingly freed three trapped American employees, Mr. Jacques Gude, Mr. Dave Robertson and Mrs. Mary Richardson and led them to safety at the stairwell.

Finding numerous others wandering through the smoke and debris, he led each to the stairwell door and safety. He then proceeded to the area that had been the KUSLO workspaces one floor below. As he proceeded down the stairwell, movement and navigation through the devastation became close to impossible. Even the simple action of breathing became more and more difficult as the smoke became increasingly thick from a fire which had started in an adjacent 30,000-liter diesel tank that had ruptured. Despite the increasing danger, Major Kringel would not abandon the hope of finding his co-workers he knew were in the KUSLO offices at the time of the blast. Without regard to his own safety, he entered what was left of the third floor. The work areas were unrecognizable. All of the interior walls had been blown out during the blast or collapsed during the aftershocks. Despite the hazards he encountered, Major Kringel began a systematic search through piled concrete, sparking wires and twisted knife-edged metal, finding the bodies of three of his colleagues. A fourth was still alive, and Major Kringel began CPR and maintained those efforts for over fifteen minutes. Despite his valliant efforts, injuries were so severe that he was unable to sustain life until additional help arrived.

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As Major Kringel continued to assist in carrying injured people down to the ground floor and out of the building, he finally realized the full measure of the danger to those still inside. Despite the full knowledge of the dangers from the instability of the remaining structure, fires, and live electric wires, Major Kringel selflessly, calmly, and without regard for his own life and safety, repeatedly entered the building until darkness made the rescue work impossible. Blood was splattered on the walls. Body parts, brain matter and other body fluids were everywhere, in stairwells, on office equipment and the rubble. He worked without rubber gloves or protective clothing. Major Kringel dug with bare hands and retrieved broken bodies and body parts. He alone is credited with pulling eight people from the building in the course of the day. Regrettably, five of his colleagues were dead. Major Kringel worked throughout that day and through the night. After thirty-six hours, on the verge of collapse, Major Kringel allowed himself to be relieved from his place of duty.

In a day that witnessed many acts of heroism and fortitude by many people, the deeds performed by Major Kringel stand out as extraordinary. The exemplary courage and heroism displayed by Major Kringel without regard for his own life reflect great credit upon himself and the United States Air Force.