

11-02-2016 Key West FL - Staff Sgt. David Whitcher – ARMY Special Forces Diver-Accident

## **Army: Special Forces soldier dies during training exercise**

<https://www.armytimes.com/articles/army-special-forces-soldier-dies-during-training-exercise>

**November 4, 2016 By: Charlsy Panzino, )**

A Fort Bragg-based soldier died during a dive training exercise off the coast of Florida on Wednesday, according to [U.S. Army Special Operations Command's Facebook](#) page.

Staff Sgt. David Whitcher, of New Hampshire, was in the Combat Diver Qualification Course and assigned to C Company, 2nd Battalion, 1st Special Warfare Training Group at the U.S. Army John F. Kennedy Special Warfare Center and School in North Carolina.

The incident occurred off of Key West, Florida.

"Our primary focus right now is to care for his loved ones," said Col. Michael Ball, commander of 7th Special Forces Group, in the Facebook post. "As always, we will take care of our own and help his family in their time of need."



**Staff Sgt. David Whitcher**  
*(Photo Credit: Army)*

Whitcher, 30, was previously assigned to C Company, 2nd Battalion, 7th Special Forces Group as a Special Forces engineer sergeant, according to USASOC. He enlisted in the New Hampshire National Guard in 2008 and deployed twice to Afghanistan. Whitcher switched to active duty in 2013 and was stationed in Alaska until he volunteered for Special Forces training — he graduated from the Special Forces Qualification Course this year.

"Staff Sgt. Whitcher's death is a sobering reminder of the dangerous training our soldiers undertake to prepare themselves for the rigors of Special Forces." Maj. Gen. James B. Linder, commander of the Special Warfare Center and School, said in the post. "Our thoughts and prayers are with Staff Sgt. Whitcher's family and friends."

The staff sergeant's awards and decorations include the Army Commendation Medal (3rd award), Army Achievement Medal (4th award), Combat Action Badge, Parachutist Badge and Special Forces Tab.

The cause of death is under investigation.

## **Fort Bragg Special Forces soldier dies during dive training near Key West**

<http://wncn.com/2016/11/05/fort-bragg-special-forces-soldier-dies-during-dive-training-near-key-west/>

November 5, 2016 **By CBS North Carolina** Updated: November 6, 2016

FORT BRAGG, N.C. (WNCN) – A Fort Bragg Special Forces soldier died Wednesday during a diving training exercise off the coast of Key West in Florida, officials say. Staff Sgt. David J. Whitcher, 30, was a student in the Combat Diver Qualification Course assigned to Company C, 2nd Battalion, 1st Special Warfare Training Group, U.S. Army John F. Kennedy Special Warfare Center and School.



Whitcher was married to Victoria Whitcher and had a son, David Jr., according to the *Concord Monitor*.

Before attending the combat diving course, Whitcher, of Bradford, New Hampshire was assigned to Company C, 2nd Battalion, 7th Special Forces Group as a Special Forces engineer sergeant, Fort Bragg official said.

“The special operations community is a close-knit family. At the U.S. Army John F. Kennedy Special Warfare Center and School (SWCS), we consider every student who enters our institution to be a part of our SWCS family. Staff Sgt. Whitcher’s death is a sobering reminder of the dangerous training our soldiers undertake to prepare themselves for the rigors of Special Forces. Our thoughts and prayers are with Staff Sgt. Whitcher’s family and friends,” said Maj. Gen. James B. Linder, commander of the U.S. Army John F. Kennedy Special Warfare Center and School. Whitcher came on active duty in 2013 and was assigned to the 6th Engineer Battalion, 2nd Engineer Brigade, Fort Richardson, Alaska.

In 2014, Whitcher volunteered for Special Forces training. He graduated from the Special Forces Qualification Course in 2016.

His military education included the Carpentry and Masonry Course, Heavy Construction Operator Course, Basic Airborne Course, Combatives Level One and Two, Combat Life Saver Course, Basic Leader Course, Advanced Leaders Course, Winter Mountain Warfare, SERE Level C, and the Spanish Language Course.

Whitcher’s awards and decorations include the Army Commendation Medal (3rd award), Army Achievement Medal (4th award), Valorous Unit Award, Meritorious Unit Commendation, Good Conduct Medal, National Defense Service Medal, Afghanistan Campaign Medal, Global War on Terrorism Service Medal, Armed Forces Reserve Medal, NCO Professional Development Ribbon (numeral 2), Army Service Ribbon, Overseas Service Ribbon, NATO Medal, New Hampshire State Active Service Ribbon, Expert in Competition Bronze Pistol Badge, Expert in Competition Bronze Rifle badge, Governors 20 Tab, Combat Action Badge, Parachutist Badge and Special Forces Tab.

## NH soldier's death in training 'a sobering reminder'

<http://www.unionleader.com/apps/pbcs.dll/article?avis=UL&date=20161106&category=NEWS18&lopenr=161109445&Ref=AR&template=printart>

November 06, 2016 By SHAWNE K. WICKHAM New Hampshire Sunday News

Born on the Fourth of July, Bradford native David Whitcher knew from the time he was 6 years old that he wanted to serve in the military.

And that's just what he did, joining the Army after high school, serving two combat tours in Afghanistan and then achieving his dream of becoming a Special Forces soldier.

Staff Sgt. Whitcher, 30, died last Wednesday during what the Army said was a dive-training exercise off the coast of Key West, Fla., on Wednesday, Nov. 2, 2016. The Army is investigating his death.

His family includes his wife, Victoria; their 8-year-old son, David Jr.; his mother, Kathleen Whitcher of Bristol; a brother, Matthew; two half-sisters and two half-brothers, according to Lt. Col. Greg Heilshorn, public affairs officer for New Hampshire National Guard.



**Staff Sgt. Whitcher, 30, died last Wednesday during what the Army said was a dive-training exercise off the coast of Key West, Fla., on Wednesday, Nov. 2, 2016.**

Whitcher will be buried in New Hampshire, but funeral arrangements have not been finalized, Heilshorn said.

Heilshorn met on Saturday with the soldier's mother, who told him that ever since her son was little, "his dream has always been to serve in the military," Heilshorn said.

"When he was a kid, he went to the dump and got an old military cot and set it up to sleep on," he said.

David Whitcher was home-schooled and earned his high school diploma from Kearsarge Regional High School. He joined the Army, serving for four years, including a combat deployment to Afghanistan.

When he left active duty in 2008, he joined the New Hampshire Army National Guard. He was trained as an engineer, with specialties in carpentry and masonry. But in 2009, when the Guard's Charlie Company, 3rd-172nd Mountain Infantry

Regiment, was deploying to Afghanistan, Whitcher stepped up again, according to Heilshorn.

"The unit was short troops so they had to pull from other units within the New Hampshire Army National Guard," he said. "He volunteered to go."

After he returned home, Whitcher earned an associate's degree in criminal justice from NHTI in Concord in 2012.

The following year, Whitcher transferred back to active duty, and volunteered for Special Forces training, according to a statement from U.S. Army Special Operations Command. He graduated from the Special Forces Qualification Course earlier this year.

Whitcher was a student in the Combat Diver Qualification Course assigned to Company C, 2nd Battalion, 1st Special Warfare Training Group, at the Army's John F. Kennedy Special Warfare Center and School at Fort Bragg, N.C., according to the Army. He and his family were living in Florida at the time of his death.

The Center's commander, Maj. Gen. James B. Linder, said Whitcher's death is "a sobering reminder of the dangerous training our soldiers undertake to prepare themselves for the rigors of Special Forces."

Whitcher was a decorated soldier. His awards include the Army Commendation Medal (3rd award), Army Achievement Medal (4th award), Valorous Unit Award, Meritorious Unit Commendation, National Defense Service Medal, Afghanistan Campaign Medal and the Global War on Terrorism Service Medal.

He was also a gifted carpenter and furniture-maker, inheriting his father's talent for woodworking, Heilshorn said.

His brother, Matthew, a New Hampshire Army Guardsman, told Heilshorn that David was a top marksman, shooting 39 out of 40 on the qualification range. "The only reason he didn't hit 40 out of 40 was the last bullet jammed," Heilshorn said.

Heilshorn said Whitcher's death is a sad reminder that the nation is still at war. "And we still have men and women who are serving all over the world, either in support of combat missions or directly in combat missions or, in the case of Staff Sgt. Whitcher, continuing his training," he said.

"Here's an individual who's already served twice in Afghanistan and decided to not only join the active duty again, but Special Forces," he said. "That speaks a lot to his dedication and his character."

Gov. Maggie Hassan on Friday directed flags in New Hampshire to half-staff on the day of Whitcher's funeral. In a statement, she said Whitcher "exemplified the very best of the Granite State's strong tradition of service to our country." And she said his "service and sacrifice made our country safer and our freedom stronger."

U.S. Sen. Kelly Ayotte, R-NH, said Witcher's death "reminds us that all of those who serve risk their lives every day to keep us safe, a sacrifice that can never be repaid."

And Sen. Jeanne Shaheen, D-NH, said "Staff Sgt. Witcher rests among an elite group of men and women who have served their country to protect the ideas fundamental to our democracy."