



## 2009 SERGEANT WILLIAM JASPER FREEDOM AWARD WINNER

Major General Robert E. Livingston Jr.

# A MAJOR SACRIFICE

By Matthew Gregory

As president, chief executive officer and owner of Gregory Electric Company, Robert E. Livingston Jr. knows what it's like to manage people, but he doesn't just manage them in an office. As a major general, Livingston is responsible for coordinating troops on the battlefield.

From May 2007 to April 2008, Major General Livingston served as commander of the Combined Joint Task Force Phoenix (VI) in Kabul, Afghanistan. He led 1,800 men and women from the South Carolina National Guard to train and mentor the Afghan army and national police. As if coordinating that many people wasn't difficult enough, Joint Task Force Phoenix met up with approximately 8,500 people from other states.

"We had a person from every state and territory of the United States. We had 20 other nations that joined with us to provide training teams. We were scattered in about 240 locations throughout Afghanistan," said Livingston. "As you can imagine, it was an interesting accountability situation and a difficult and challenging force protection piece. It turned out to be an extremely successful mission."

Livingston deflects any praise and insists he owes it all to the great corps brought from South Carolina and the other leaders he worked with. Livingston was promoted to major general in January 2009 and currently serves as director of the J5 Coalition Coordination Center at United States Central Command in Florida. Central Command works to maintain relationships and strategic partnerships with more than 60 nations that have banded together. Central Command supports non-U.S. militaries moving into Afghanistan and Iraq. For instance, they recently facilitated the training of a Jordan ranger battalion into Afghanistan to support U.S. Marines. Livingston said their main areas of interest are providing support in Afghanistan and Iraq as well as combating piracy.

Livingston credits his parents with inspiring his business acumen as well as his military service. Born in Columbia, S.C. in 1956, Livingston's parents ran Livingston Insurance Agency. Livingston said he applies many of his parents' business principles at Gregory Electric, such as taking care of employees, having a strong work ethic and always doing the right thing.

"Daddy was always service-oriented. He was in the National Guard for quite awhile. He served on the school board and was very active in the community. I think that gave me a lot of my sense of service and my sense of entrepreneurialship," said Livingston.

When Livingston went through high school and college, he was interested in the military, but he did not consider joining. He credits a combina-



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tion of experiences he had with a volunteer fire department and his father's National Guard service for attracting him to service.

"I pursued a chemistry degree and eventually an electrical engineering degree. All that time in the back of my head, I realized I needed to do something for my country, too," he said.

After enlisting in the South Carolina Army National Guard in 1978, Livingston's first assignment was serving as platoon leader for Company A, 4<sup>th</sup> Battalion, 118<sup>th</sup> Infantry in Winnsboro, S.C. He rose the ranks through the years, receiving numerous awards and decorations along the way. From June 2004 to January 2005, Livingston commanded Task Force 218 in support of Operation Noble Eagle, a Homeland Security mission that supplemented the security at army posts and air bases after September 11, 2001. He picked up another mission where he brought wounded reserve soldiers back to the U.S. This allowed wounded soldiers to work at military facilities in their communities, get care with local providers and have the support of their families.

While serving as commander of Joint Task Force Phoenix in Afghanistan, Livingston spent 70 percent of his time visiting sites on the frontlines. Livingston will nonchalantly tell you he was shot at a few times, but he is





quick to point out his troops were the ones who encountered the real danger.

"It's not that you march into battle very often, although I did go with some units into combat operations. Instead, you have something happen that's very furious, then it's quiet again," said Livingston. "The quiet professionalism of our great troopers certainly gave me the confi-

dence to go into certain areas where you didn't see any U.S. leaders. It's not that the danger was not present or that the shooting did not occur, but I don't want to take from the great sacrifices a lot of the soldiers saw every day."

When reflecting on his time in Afghanistan, a country he describes as being caught between 2009 and biblical times, Livingston recalls many success stories.

"I visited the 203<sup>rd</sup> Corps, which was our

poster child of advances. We were the first Task Force Phoenix able to certify an Afghan unit as completely independent. Seeing them advance certainly was a time of pride," he said.

When Livingston and his troops first came to Afghanistan, they were supposed to pick up an extra 3,000 troopers to take on mentoring the police at the district level. Two days after they arrived, Livingston learned the 3,000 soldiers had been redirected to Iraq. But the police were dying at a rate of 200-300 a month, so they had to do something.

"I pulled together all the great people on this task force and asked them to stretch it out as much as we could, and we came up with a structure where we were able to go from 120 mentoring locations to 240 mentoring locations in about a three-month period, which included retraining and re-orienting a lot of people. We went from the police dying from the 200-300 rate to about 20 or 30," said Livingston.

"As we went into the winter, we started a reformation program that took the police out of one district and replaced them with the national police. We retrained the police and retooled a lot of the administrative pieces and put them back into the district with mentors. That really started forming pockets of highly professional police throughout critical areas. And we didn't start at the easy districts; we started at the very hard districts. That task force stopped the police from being slaughtered and formed a foundation that is reforming the police today," said Livingston.

Despite his hard work as a major general, Livingston works a second full-time job at Gregory Electric, one of the South Carolina Chamber of Commerce's first Pinnacle members. Livingston said he owes a lot to the great people he has at Gregory Electric.

"They have been able to properly respond to our customers. Quite frankly, we have some customers who are very understanding, too. They allow my vice presidents to interface with them when maybe I should be the guy interfacing with them. We obviously don't cut quality or service, but sometimes I'm just not available to meet with them, and our vice presidents handle it. We certainly appreciate all that great support," he said.

The constant travel also is a strain on Livingston's wife, Barbara, and his four children. Livingston credits his wife with keeping the family running, and he said she also keeps up with the bigger family formed by his command.

"Bob's deployment this time is very different from his first one because he's in and out of my life and the kids' lives but not on a consistent basis. Whereas with Afghanistan, I knew he was gone, and there wasn't any emotional up and down roller coaster," said Barbara Livingston. She said it's important to stay in touch with other soldiers' families. "They understand what you're going through. It's a help for them, and it's a help for you."

Despite the hectic schedule and constant travel, Livingston feels it's a sacrifice that's worth it in the end.

**General Livingston's Fast Facts**

**Favorite Movie:** *The Lord of the Rings* Trilogy

**Favorite Book:** *The Wheel of Time* series by Robert Jordan

**Favorite Color:** Blue

**Favorite Weekend Activity:** A long bicycle ride followed by sitting around with friends

**People might be surprised to know that I:** am a shy person

**Song playing on your iPod right now:** *Baba O'Riley* by The Who

**If I could time travel, I'd go to:** The Middle East in 30 A.D.

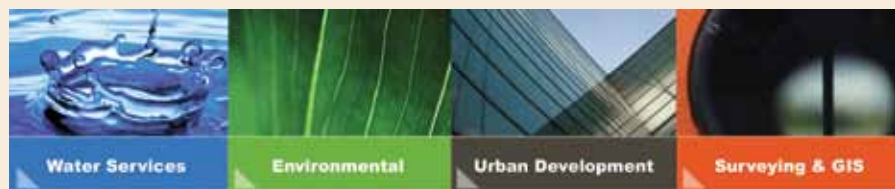
**Favorite Hobbies:** running, lifting weights, woodworking

**Pet Peeve:** People who don't follow through on things

"What we're doing [in Afghanistan] is not in vain. What we're doing is not without precedence. We're just not going to see something that looks like a European country or the United States in the next 20 years," said Livingston. "People will be able to participate in regional commerce, and I'm really encouraged by that."

Matthew Gregory is a communications associate at the South Carolina Chamber of Commerce.

*The Sergeant William Jasper Freedom Award was established in 1984 by the South Carolina Chamber of Commerce. The Sergeant William Jasper Freedom Award, named for the Revolutionary War patriot, recognizes individuals who have made significant contributions to the freedom of South Carolina and the nation.*



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