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A 32-year-old CIA operative Mike Spann becomes the first U.S. casualty in the war in Afghanistan.

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Transcript

CIA Operative is First U.S. Casualty in Afghanistan

JIM MIKLASZEWSKI reporting:

This is Jim Miklaszewski outside Washington where the flag at CIA headquarters is lowered to half-staff today. It's a rare public display of grief over the loss over one of its own: thirty-two-year-old Johnny Michael Spann, known simply as Mike, father of three and a former Marine. Today, his father said Mike had the right stuff.

Mr. JOHNNY SPANN (Father of Mike Spann): We recall him saying, “Someone has got to do the things no one else wants to do.” That is exactly what he was doing in Afghanistan.

MIKLASZEWSKI: Spann was working counterterrorism in the CIA's elite Special Activities Division. He and another CIA operative, seen here and identified only as David, were gathering intelligence, questioning Taliban prisoners at this fort outside Mazar-e Sharif three days ago when suddenly all hell breaks loose. The Taliban prisoners jump their guards and seize their weapons. Mike struggles to hang onto his sidearm, but is quickly overpowered and fatally shot. As gunshots ring out, David is forced to flee. Dressed in native garb, he says he fired his weapon into the mob but there were too many to hold off. As the battle rages on, you hear David frantically radio to US military forces.

DAVID: There's hundreds dead here, at least, and I'm not--I don't know how many Americans are here. I think one was killed. I'm not sure. I'm not sure. There was two at least, me and some other guy.

MIKLASZEWSKI: As the fighting intensifies, David is forced to retreat over the wall to safety.

But as tragically as this mission ended, it's only one small part of the CIA's unprecedented role in the war in Afghanistan. Scores of CIA operatives have been on the ground working side by side with US Special Forces. The CIA was the first to fire missiles from an unmanned drone against the enemy and was instrumental in the killing of Osama bin Laden's top deputy, Mohammed Atef. On the memorial wall at the CIA there are currently 78 stars for each agent killed in the line of duty.

Michael Spann will be number 79. Jim Miklaszewski, NBC News, the Pentagon.