

Business

# New at the top: A military commander prepares to lead in private business

**Correction:** *A previous version of this profile incorrectly said that Nils C. “Chris” Sorenson was a member of Texas A&M’s core cadets. It should have said Corps of Cadets. It also said that he was a member of the first Special Forces group at Fort Lewis, Wash. It should have said the 1st Special Forces Group.*

By Interview with Vanessa Small  
December 30, 2012

It was Sept. 11, 2001. I was a commando in the Army. It just so happened I was on alert with my sergeant major. We were sitting in the office about to start a training exercise.

We looked up at the television and saw the first aircraft hit the World Trade Center in New York. We were staring, not sure what it was. Then the second plane hit, and within minutes I heard people dragging bags as if we were going to load out. Guys were switched on.

By chance, I was in position to command a ground force for the first raid against the Taliban. I look back on that experience and how everything I had learned in my life came together at that moment, to put together a plan and execute a very high-risk operation.

My mom and dad were red-white-and-blue Texans to the bone.

My dad dropped out of high school when he was 15, at the tail end of World War II. He joined the Texas National Guard, and about six months in they booted him out because they discovered he was too young. He never went back to school. He just waited it out until he was 17. He got his parents’ permission and went back in. He did his service in Japan during the Korean War and stayed as a full-time member of the Texas Air Guard.

At Texas A&M, I was a member of the Corps of Cadets but I wanted to be a fighter pilot. When I found out that my eyesight wasn’t good enough, I had to find another route.

I went to airborne school, signed a contract with Army ROTC and then went to Ranger school, which pointed me in the Army's direction.

I became a Green Beret and went to serve in the 1st Special Forces Group at Fort Lewis, Wash.

From there, I wanted to do something more. I joined the most lethal-thinking commando force on the planet, which gave me a broadening of Ranger Special Forces and on the elite side of Special Operations.

Then the Sept. 11 attacks hit. I felt really proud to be a part of the tactical planning. All of us knew that there would be no culminating event and a ceremony to follow. We knew we would be in this for a while.

Eventually, I was selected to command the largest military community outside of the United States. It was a huge community headquartered in Germany. We put in motion a \$1 billion modernization effort. I learned more about business in that one assignment than I ever did in my whole time in the Army.

I was going to retire when I was asked to be the operations officer for all of Army Special Operations forces. We stood up a new command, called the Military Information Support Operations Command. That made me the first commander to get it going, get our standards set, and put the values in place.

That role also gave me the tools I'm able to put in place here at Triple Canopy.

I decided to make the leap to Triple Canopy because when you look at the company there is a resounding mantra of legal, moral and ethical. That is transcribed directly from the books of special operations.

I'll never forget the last 28 years in the Army. But like those great athletes out there, if you're looking behind you while you're running, you're looking in the wrong direction. If you want to win, keep looking forward. I look forward to embedding myself here and keep the company moving forward.

— *Interview with Vanessa Small*

## **Nils C. "Chris" Sorenson**

**Position:** Chief operating officer of Triple Canopy, a Reston government contractor.

**Career highlights:** Recently retired as a colonel with the U.S. Army, having achieved over 28 years of Special Operations and military service expertise.

**Age:** 51

**Education:** BS, Industrial Distribution, Texas A&M University; MS, Administration, Central Michigan University.

**Personal:** Lives in Reston with his wife and children.

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