



Press Contacts:

Harsimran Kaur, Sikh Coalition: harsimran@sikhcoalition.org or 847.867.2647

Amandeep Sidhu, McDermott Will & Emery LLP: asidhu@mwe.com or 202.756.8380

Amardeep Singh, Sikh Coalition: amar@sikhcoalition.org or 917.628.0091

First Sikh U.S. Army Officer Successfully Completes Basic Training in Two Decades

Recruit Accepted by Fellow Soldiers and Excels During Training



(San Antonio, TX) March 22, 2010 – Captain Tejdeep Singh Rattan graduated from basic training today at Fort Sam Houston in San Antonio to great fanfare from the nation’s Sikh American community. Captain Rattan is the first turbaned Sikh officer to complete basic training in over two decades.

“I am overjoyed to serve my country, work with my fellow soldiers, and to have completed basic training,” said **Captain Tejdeep Singh Rattan**. “Most importantly, in preparation for my work as a soldier, I was able to successfully complete all aspects of my initial training. I had an overwhelmingly positive experience. I am very thankful to

the base command, Army leadership, and my fellow soldiers. I look forward to continuing to serve my country.”

Captain Rattan was recruited to join the Army’s Health Professions Scholarship Program several years ago. He maintained his turban throughout his dental education.

Nevertheless, after completing his education, he was told that he must remove his religiously-mandated turban and unshorn hair before he began active duty.

Last April, he submitted a request to the Army asking that he be allowed to maintain his turban and beard while serving the Army. This past December, the Army granted his request for accommodation.

Contrary to the concerns of some, Captain Rattan was able to meet all the requirements of a soldier during basic training. He wore a helmet over a small turban during field exercises. During gas mask exercises, he successfully created a seal. He also built strong bonds with the soldiers in his platoon.

“We are pleased to learn that Tejdeep’s experience demonstrates that Sikh service in the U.S. Army meets military necessity,” said **Harsimran Kaur**, Legal Director, Sikh Coalition.

“Turbaned Sikhs previously served the United States’ military with distinction in every

major armed conflict over the past 100 years. While it is unfortunate that Sikhs were excluded from the military for the past two decades, I hope we will soon turn a page and restore Sikh service in the U.S. military. Sikhs freely serve in the militaries of Great Britain, Canada and India, and as United Nations Peacekeepers. Whether through Tejdeep's experience here in Fort Sam Houston or through the experience of hundreds of thousands of Sikh soldiers in militaries throughout the world, we know Sikhs are capable soldiers. We look forward to the day when the U.S. Army again welcomes the service of all Sikhs."

In 1981, the Army banned "conspicuous" religious articles of faith for its service members. This included a ban on Sikh turbans and unshorn hair in the Army. Though Captain Rattan was successful in his requests for accommodation, his accommodation applied only in his individual case. The general policy disallowing Sikhs from maintaining their articles of faith in the military still remains in effect.

To learn more, please visit our [Campaign Media Center](#) or email us at media@sikhcoalition.org.

##