



BATTLE at COP KEATING

This Month in NCO History: Battle at Cop Keating — Oct. 3, 2009

Pablo Villa

For Soldiers stationed at Combat Outpost Keating in the fall of 2009, it was immediately evident that this particular Saturday would be unlike any other.

In the predawn hours of Oct. 3, 2009, a hail of gunfire descended on the outpost, which sat in a narrow valley surrounded by the Hindu Kush mountains in the eastern Afghanistan province of Nuristan near the border with Pakistan. A force of about 400 Taliban fighters began assaulting the compound from five vantage points in the mountains.

COP Keating was defended by 50 American Soldiers, an Afghan National Army unit and its two Latvian Army trainers. The American Soldiers, assigned to B Troop, 3rd Squadron, 61st Cavalry Regiment, 4th Brigade Combat Team, 4th Infantry Division, had been at the outpost since May of that year. Having faced enemy fire almost daily in the difficult-to-defend complex, the Army had planned its closure. The all-out attack Oct. 3 hastened those plans.

As insurgents targeted the outpost's mortar pit with a barrage of bullets, others nearly overwhelmed every other spot within the football-field sized compound from their positions in the mountains. A simultaneous attack was carried out on nearby Observation Post Fritsche, which cut off support to COP Keating for most of the day. Taliban forces would breach COP Keating and inflict casual-

ties within an hour of the start of the attack. They wouldn't be completely driven back until late in the afternoon.

The American Soldiers fought fiercely, killing an estimated 150 Taliban fighters en route to retaking COP Keating. Later in the day, OP Fritsche was secured and able to provide indirect support. Overhead, two U.S. Air Force F-15E fighter bombers helped coordinate airstrikes. Eventually, COP Keating was secured.

Eight of the 50 U.S. Soldiers defending the outpost were killed in the battle, which lasted 12 hours. An additional 27 were wounded.

The daylong firefight was vaulted into the spotlight this year after two NCOs — Staff Sgt. Ty M. Carter and Staff Sgt. Clinton L. Romesha — were awarded the Medal of Honor for their actions during the battle.

Carter, a specialist at the time of the attack, received the medal in August. He displayed bravery in traversing a wide-open expanse of the compound three times to provide ammunition to a group of Soldiers pinned down behind a humvee. Carter also exposed himself to enemy fire to rescue a fellow Soldier, Spc. Stephan Mace. Carter then retrieved a radio that belonged to a fallen Soldier that helped him and Sgt. Bradley Larson flee their pinned-down position and get Mace to safety. Mace eventually died from his wounds after being airlifted from the outpost.

Romesha was awarded the medal in February. Though wounded early in the battle, he continued fighting. Romesha was instrumental in leading a group of Soldiers who reclaimed the outpost's ammunition depot and repelling insurgents who had breached COP Keating near its entry control point. He also directed air support and led Soldiers in laying down suppressive fire, which allowed Carter and Larson to move Mace to safety.

The honors mark the first time two living Americans were awarded the nation's highest military honor for the same battle since the Battle of Ap Pac in South Vietnam in 1963. Nine other Soldiers were decorated with the Silver Star for their actions during the fight. COP Keating was evacuated two days later. ■

— Compiled by Pablo Villa



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