



By Example: Training and Repetition Pay Off When Enemy Arrives

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This story is part of a periodic NCO Journal feature that takes a closer look at an Army award in an NCO's career. This month we focus on the Army Commendation Medal with "V" device for valor.

First Sgt. Justin Stewart is currently serving as first sergeant for Bravo Battery, 3rd Battalion, 7th Field Artillery Regiment, 3rd Brigade Combat Team, 25th Infantry Division, in Hawaii. But in August 2005, he was a staff sergeant with Bravo Troop, 1st Squadron, 3rd Armored Cavalry Regiment when his actions earned him the Army Commendation Medal with "V" device.

Stewart's squadron was part of an effort to "clear, hold, rebuild" in the area of Tal Afar, Iraq. The effort was difficult in Tal Afar, Stewart said, because "there were a lot of foreign fighters — from Syria, Iran, other

places were all in there. It was getting pretty ugly." During a period of several weeks, the Army cleared neighboring areas, chasing the enemy into Tal Afar. Then the effort to clear Tal Afar itself began.

"We started dropping fliers all over the city to say that anybody out on the street was going to be considered a combative," Stewart said. "So it really took a turn toward a more force-on-force linear conflict, as opposed to the counterinsurgency as we were normally treating it."

Stewart's troop was clearing a block when a tank was struck by a rocket-propelled grenade and was disabled. Though recovery efforts began immediately, the tall buildings and high roofs of Tal Afar allowed enemy fighters to swarm to advantageous positions. "[The tank crew] started getting attacked pretty heavily by small-arms fire," Stewart said. "We were able to see RPG



First Sgt. Justin Stewart earned the Army Commendation Medal with "V" device for valor when he was a staff sergeant serving in Iraq in 2005.

teams starting to maneuver to attack the recovery vehicle, as well as the disabled tank and crew as they were forced to get out and hook up tow winches.

"I'm a fire support specialist (13F) by trade, forward observer," Stewart said. "I was in a Bradley, and we maneuvered into position to provide direct fire support with the 25-millimeter gun. I was able to engage and destroy two of the RPG teams that maneuvered onto the roofs overhead as they were trying to attack with direct fire. I started calling in indirect fire from the 120-millimeter mortars that were attached to the troop, so we were able to put down indirect fire to basically break up the merge coming down the street from the north. I was able to en-

gage some of the rooftop RPG teams as they were trying to kill the tank and crew recovering it.

"We pulled them out and were able to recover the vehicle. No loss of life, so a successful day. We moved the tank out and continued our mission."

How do your actions that day show the best of the U.S. Army NCO Corps?

Just in itself, watching out for Soldier welfare, making sure the mission gets accomplished. Our mission was taking the area and destroying the enemy. Really that's the uppermost responsibilities in the noncommissioned officer's mind: accomplishment of the mission and welfare of the Soldiers. So, I guess in that case, it was taking care of the Soldiers in the other vehicle, taking care of the Soldiers in my vehicle, making sure they were able to recover property and life and moving out. And then, we continued to accomplish the mission.

What do you hope your Soldiers and junior NCOs learn from your actions that day?

Repetition and training pay off. We spent so much time every day not letting complacency get to us out at our base. We made sure we were continuing to practice our fire support craft, even though at the time, that deployment, we hadn't been doing much of it. It was where we stepped off the high-intensity conflict, started more stability support. So you didn't get to do much indirect fire. But practicing and not letting that complacency kick in, making sure the craft was still honed, that's what ensured that when the time came, I was still able to call for fire and put down effective rounds and, ultimately, kill bad guys.

Why did you decide to join the Army and why have you continued to serve?

I've always wanted to be a Soldier ever since I was a little kid building guns out of Legos. I don't know if I should blame Arnold Schwarzenegger and the Comman-

do movies, but it's something I've always wanted to do. As I've stayed, my motivation has evolved. As I've matured as an adult, so have my goals and my reasons for continuing to serve. What may have started out as just an underlying, 'I want to be a combat Soldier. It's fun; it's cool.' ... as I've been shaped, I'm starting to understand the Army Values, what it means to lead and train Soldiers. That's what motivates me now — the ability to continue to stay in touch, continue to train, and watch these Soldiers develop into leaders themselves.

What role have NCOs played in your development?

From my very first chief, who I still stay in contact with ... I can remember meeting him the day I hit the ground at my unit. Unfortunately he got wounded in Iraq after we had parted ways. I was a staff sergeant, and

he went on to Korea, then back to Iraq, and ended up getting injured and medically discharged. But I still stay in touch with him. The training from day one from him about how to call for fire, how to properly employ the equipment, I used it that day out there and continue to use it and pass it down to my Soldiers.

What makes a good NCO?

Discipline, accountability and leading from the front.

What advice do you have for junior NCOs?

Never waste time. Leadership starts first thing in the morning. You have to take ownership and accountability of every aspect of training and every bit of time you get, from the moment you start doing PT, until the moment the day ends. Don't waste time. Be accountable for your Soldiers, be accountable for their training. ■



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