



# By Example: NCO's Improvisation on the Battlefield Helped Team Come Home Safe

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NCO Journal

*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 career of an NCO who was awarded the Bronze Star with "V" device. The Bronze Star may be awarded for bravery, acts of merit or meritorious service. The "V" device denotes individuals who were awarded a decoration in recognition of valorous acts performed during direct combat with an enemy force.*

**S**gt. 1st Class Michael Skellie, the battalion operations NCO in charge for 1st Battalion, 5th Infantry Regiment, at Fort Wainwright, Alaska, was a staff sergeant serving in Ramadi, Iraq, in 2005 when his valorous actions under fire earned him the Bronze Star with "V" device.

Skellie's platoon had just returned to its outpost when another platoon's tank on patrol in Ramadi was hit by a large explosive and immobilized. Parts of Skellie's platoon, along with some of the command group, went out in a mix of humvees and tanks to rescue the immobilized tank and its Soldiers.

"When I got out there, the turret of the tank couldn't move," Skellie said. "They couldn't really defend themselves. Once I got on the ground, we were taking fire. The first thing we had to do was set up a hasty defense just so we could operate. We couldn't even get out of our trucks.

They had fire all around us. You could see guys running up and down the alleys shooting at us."

After setting up a defensive perimeter and pushing the enemy back, Skellie and his platoon got the tow bars hooked up to the tank. But before they could move out, the company commander's truck was hit by a rocket-propelled grenade. So, while continuing the defense, Skellie hooked up the company commander's truck to his truck. Everybody made it back to their vehicles and moved out to return to their post.

For his actions that day, Skellie received a Bronze Star with "V" device, and he has also earned two Army Commendation Medals with "V" device during his time in service.

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## What do you hope your Soldiers and junior NCOs can learn from the actions you took that day?

They can learn, just as I had learned and had been taught by my fellow NCOs, how to not only react to contact, but be able to improvise. And they can learn that, as we have gone through all the things we have gone through during the past 10 or 12 years of war, the NCO Corps truly is the "backbone of the Army." They have

taught and been at the forefront of all of these years, as well as the entire time the Army has existed. The NCOs really have led from the front and taught all the Soldiers what they need to know.

### **Why have you continued to serve?**

It's the only thing I've known in my adult life, as a job, as a career. There's a lot of good in it; I enjoy it. I enjoy all the interaction with Soldiers and teaching Soldiers the things I have learned, helping Soldiers grow in their career. It's a lot of fun.

### **What is your MOS and why did you choose it?**

My MOS is a 19K (M1 Abrams armor crewman). I actually changed my MOS early on in my career. I did that because I had always supported the tanks and enjoyed looking at tanks, so I decided I wanted to be on tanks. I think of the tanks as the tip of the spear, so that's why I chose the MOS that I did.

### **What role have NCOs played in your development?**

I wouldn't be at the rank and where I am today if it wasn't for many NCOs taking time to lead me, show me the right way, show me the things I needed to do, show me what real leadership is. There's been a handful who have really taken their time with me. It definitely affected me and made me into the NCO I am today.

### **What makes a good NCO?**

Not only do they know their job, but they care enough about their Soldiers to care for them not just on the job, but also when they're off work. They really take care of you, really put in the time, invest in your life and steer you in a career path that they know is best for you. It may not be what you want to hear at the time, but they

know that is what is going to help you succeed and make you a better Soldier.

### **What advice do you have for junior NCOs?**

Take something from every NCO whom you run into, whether good or bad. Try to take a nugget and absorb as much as you can from every NCO whom you are around and put it in your toolbag. That way, as you progress through the ranks, you can use the wealth of knowledge and information you have gathered from many NCOs to help make you into the NCO that you should be.

### **How has the NCO Education System impacted your career?**

When you go to combined arms, when you have infantry and armor and all those guys coming together, you get to learn a lot from your peers who are in other MOSs. You get to see a side of the Army that is not necessarily your side of the Army. You get to see other MOSs and how they operate. You get to see all the different aspects of the Army, because the Army is a fairly large organization, and people may do things differently in different places and different MOSs. You get to learn from all of them, and that definitely helps you as you move along in your career. ■



Enduring Freedom SFC Michael Skellie — YouTube Video (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7KM2zg-QGIE>)

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