



Former Army Sgt. Kyle Jerome White receives the Medal of Honor from President Barack Obama at the White House on May 13, 2014, for his life-saving actions during a Taliban ambush in Afghanistan in November 2007. (Photo by J.D. Leipold)

Former NCO Becomes Ninth Soldier to Receive Medal of Honor Since 9/11

By J.D. Leipold

Army News Service

Former Sgt. Kyle Jerome White was awarded the Medal of Honor by President Barack Obama at a White House ceremony yesterday, making him the sixth living Army recipient, and the 14th from all services, to earn the medal in either Iraq or Afghanistan.

Obama opened his remarks in the East Room by paying tribute not just to White, but to what he referred to as the “9/11 Generation,” all those young citizens who came forth after Sept. 11, 2001, to volunteer their service knowing full well what the cost could be.

“For more than 12 years, with our nation at war, the men and women of our armed forces have known the measure of danger that comes with military service,” he said. “But year after year, tour after tour, they have displayed a selfless willingness to incur it — by stepping forward, by volunteering, by serving and sacrificing greatly to keep us all safe.

“Today, our troops are coming home,” he added, saying that by year’s end the war in Afghanistan will be over. “And, today, we pay tribute to a Soldier who embodies



White smiles as the audience applauds after he received the Medal of Honor from President Obama on May 13, 2014. (Photo by J.D. Leipold)

the courage of his generation — a young man who was a freshman in high school when the Twin Towers fell, and who just five years later became an elite paratrooper with the legendary 173rd Airborne — the Sky Soldiers.”

The president recounted the Nov. 9, 2007, ambush outside the village of Aranas, in which five Soldiers and a Marine would perish as White’s unit of 13 Americans and a squad of Afghan soldiers descended into what was called “Ambush Alley.” Suddenly, the chatter of AK-47s and the smoke trails of rocket-propelled grenades lit up the valley, sending shattered shards and chunks of red-hot metal and rock flying.

With nowhere to escape the three-pronged onslaught but down a steep decline, White, 1st Lt. Matthew Ferrara, Spc. Kain Schilling, Marine Sgt. Phillip Bocks and an interpreter were left stranded as the rest of the unit slid 160 feet down the mountain.

The 20-year-old then-specialist emptied one 30-round clip from his M-4. But as he went to slide another into place, an RPG screamed in nearby and, “It was just lights out,” White later described. That wouldn’t be the last time that day he would be rocked by a nearby explosion.

White saw his buddy Schilling trying to stay in the shade of what Schilling later recalled “as the smallest tree on earth.” Schilling had been wounded severely in his right upper arm, so White sprinted to Schilling, applied a tourniquet, then saw Bocks.

After four sprints and attempts to pull Bocks to cover, White was finally successful, and began administering first aid. He applied a tourniquet, but it was too late. Bocks wounds had been too severe, and he passed away. When White looked up, he saw Schilling take another round, this time to his left leg. Again, he sprinted to Schilling, but out of tourniquets, he had to use his belt to once again stop the bleeding.

While the one-way battle continued, White saw his lieutenant lying face down. He ran to Ferrara’s aid, but he was already dead. As White recalled in an earlier interview, he had accepted that he and Schilling weren’t going to make it through this firefight.

“It’s just a matter of time before I’m dead,” White had said. “I figured if that’s going to happen, I might as well help while I can.”

White next secured a radio, as both his and Schilling’s had been destroyed by small-arms fire. He relayed a situational report and called for mortars, artillery, air strikes and helicopter gun runs. Suddenly and for the second time that day, an explosion that “scrambled my brains a little bit there,” concussed White. A friendly 120-mm mortar round had fallen a bit short of its intended target.

Though struggling to keep Schilling and himself from falling asleep, White was eventually able to lay out a landing zone and assist the flight medic in hoist-

ing all the wounded aboard. Only then did he allow himself to be medically evacuated.

Today, nearly seven years later, White and each of the surviving Soldiers of the Battle of Aranas, wears a stainless steel wristband made by one of the unit's Soldiers. Each is etched with the names of those who didn't come home: 1st Lt. Matthew C. Ferrara, Sgt. Jeffery S. Mersman, Spc. Sean K.A. Langevin, Spc. Lester G. Roque, Pfc. Joseph M. Lancour and Marine Sgt. Phillip A. Bocks.

"Kyle, members of 'Chosen' Company, you did your duty, and now it's time for America to do ours," Obama said. "You make us proud, and you motivate all of us to be the best we can be as Americans, as a nation."

Following the ceremony, White offered his thoughts to the media.

"I wear this medal for my team," White said. "I also wear a piece of metal around my wrist. It was given to me by another survivor of the 9 November ambush; he wears an identical one," White said. "This has made it even more precious than the medal of symbol just placed around my neck. On it are the names of six fallen brothers; they are my heroes." ■

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