

# SPC. RUSKE RECEIVES SILVER STAR



*By Staff Sgt. Melissa Garcia  
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**“WE WENT LOOKING FOR THE TALIBAN—  
and we found them.”**

Sgt. 1st Class David Baltrusaitis, along with nine of his team members found a lot of Taliban fighters on April 21, 2008, perhaps 50 or so, well-armed and on the high ground.

The Americans were soon in the fight of their lives, a battle that would see one of them, a 28-year-old Army Reserve Soldier,

The squad was in the village of Afghanya conducting a dismounted presence patrol in Kapisa Province, Afghanistan. These patrols helped the Americans to get a general feel for the people. With them this day were two Afghan National Police (ANP) officers.

“There was an old guy in his 50s and a younger guy in his 20s,” Ruske said of the ANP officers. “I recognized the older guy from the vehicle check points we had done. He was always helpful and nice to me.”

The two ANP officers with the squad were not as lucky.

“The opening salvo hit both ANP officers,” Ruske said. “These poor ANPs weren’t even supposed to be with us that day, but they came along to help us out.”

The younger ANP, struck by a bullet in the forearm, made it back with the Americans and was treated immediately. In the open, under the unrelenting Taliban fire, the second ANP was on his back, not moving. The squad had no medic, but the squad members were trained combat lifesavers.

The patrol fell back and took cover behind the wall of a large two-family compound.

“We kicked down the door of the courtyard and kept returning fire for I don’t know how long,” Baltrusaitis recalled. “The enemy was maneuvering on us. We called for help, but the nearby patrol got pinned down at the same time.”

A communications glitch prevented the air support flying overhead from engaging the enemy.

“We had no combat air support, no vehicles and no medic,” Ruske said. “I told our lieutenant and Sgt. 1st Class Baltrusaitis that I was going to go up on the roof and see if I could get a better angle up there. My buddy, Spc. Eric Seagraves, and Capt. Jason Monholland came with me and we climbed a little ladder to the roof of the home. We couldn’t see much of anything, so we turned to go back down.”

The captain and Seagraves had started down the ladder when “things started exploding around us,” Ruske said. He threw himself down and returned fire, barely realizing he had been hit.

**“Nothing seemed to be going our way that day,” Ruske said. “The enemy had the high ground, and help was a long hike away. The rounds came within inches of my walking out of there with a hole in the head. I considered myself lucky.” —Spc. Gregory Scott Ruske**

attached to this squad of Pennsylvania Army National Guardsmen, perform so heroically that he would earn the Silver Star.

That Army Reserve Soldier was Spc. Gregory Scott Ruske, attached as a member of Baltrusaitis’ team from the 1st Squad, 3rd Battalion, 103rd Armor Regiment. The regiment was attached to a task force from the 101st Airborne Division (Air Assault). Ruske was the squad’s grenadier. He was on his first deployment to Afghanistan.

The patrol was suddenly hit by gunfire coming from the hills surrounding the valley. A hail of grenade, rifle and machine gun fire came at the patrol as they passed through an open field at the edge of the village.

“Nothing seemed to be going our way that day,” Ruske said. “The enemy had the high ground, and help was a long hike away. The rounds came within inches of my walking out of there with a hole in the head. I considered myself lucky.”



Army Reserve Spc. Gregory S. Ruske tries to calm Afghan National Police officers wounded in combat in the Afghanya Valley, Kapisa Province, Afghanistan, April 21, 2008. Ruske and the officers were on patrol with 3rd Platoon, Company A, Task Force Gladiator, Combined Joint Task Force 101.

(Photo Courtesy of the U.S. Army)



“After he got dragged back and we put a tourniquet on him, he would start shivering uncontrollably. I did what I could to keep him calm between all the other stuff going on.”

Eventually, the patrol was relieved. Other than Ruske and the two Afghans, there were no friendly casualties. Something had gone his way after all.

“Despite everything that went wrong that day, I feel like we did all right,” he said. “We managed to bring everyone home alive.”

After finishing his tour in Afghanistan, Ruske came home and returned to his civilian job as a juvenile corrections officer in Denver, Colo. Fully recovered from his wound, Ruske and his team leader recently reminisced about the battle.

Ruske said he did not think his action deserved such a high decoration.

“I felt like someone had snapped me in my left hip and back with a rubber band,” he said. “Surprisingly, it didn’t hurt at all. I looked at my glove and saw blood. The round punched through my magazine and came out my lower back. I decided maybe the roof wasn’t the place to be.”

After another Soldier applied a dressing to his wound, Ruske moved to the corner of the house and saw the older ANP crawling along a shallow ditch.

“I noticed rounds impacting the ground near him and he looked scared—those [expletive] were taking potshots at him while he was wounded and crawling,” Ruske said.

Ruske quickly convinced some of the squad members to provide suppressive fire as he and Seagraves raced to the ditch and quickly moved the ANP to safety.

While the wounded Afghan was being treated, the wounded Ruske kept firing back at the enemy with his grenade launcher. While doing so, he took time to calm the man whose life he had just saved by holding his hand to reassure him that he was going to be okay.

“There were times when I didn’t think he was going to make it,” Ruske said.





Baltrusaitis, who recommended him for the Silver Star, said that he had carefully checked into the criteria, which calls for ‘gallantry in action while engaged in combat against an enemy, or while serving in combat with Friendly Foreign Forces’.

“What you did that day was right in keeping with that,” Baltrusaitis told the younger Soldier.

Both said they would go back and fight again with the same bunch of guys they served with during in Afghanistan. For Baltrusaitis, he would be particularly pleased if that bunch included a Soldier named Ruske.

“I think of him as a hero,” Baltrusaitis said of Ruske. “He risked his life for a guy he didn’t even know. It says a lot about him personally. Absolutely one of the bravest men I have had to fight next to.”

His comrades, an Afghan police officer and the U.S. Army would agree. But like many Soldiers in extraordinary circumstances, Ruske does not think he acted heroically.

“I reacted based on my upbringing, training and compassion, and, thankfully, it worked out in the end,” Ruske said. 🇺🇸

*Editor’s Note: Spc. Ruske was promoted to the rank of Sergeant Jun. 23, 2008, about a week before the end of his deployment.*



Lt. Gen. Jack C. Stultz, chief, Army Reserve and Command Sgt. Maj. of the Army Reserve Leon Caffie, award Sgt. Gregory S. Ruske the Silver Star during the Senior Leader War Council held in Orlando, Oct. 23, 2008. Also present was Ruske’s mother, Somsri Ruske. (Photo by Pfc. Ian Morales) • Army Reserve Spc. Gregory S. Ruske watches over an Arizona National Guard platoon as it moves down the wadi in the Alasay Valley, Alasay District, Kapisa Province, Afghanistan, Nov. 16, 2007. Ruske was an individual augmentee assigned to Company B, Task Force Gladius, Combined Joint Task Force 82. CJTF 82 in Afghanistan is responsible for security and stability operations in NATO’s Regional Command East. (Photo Courtesy of the U.S. Army) • A Soldier on patrol studies the rugged terrain surrounding farm fields in the Afhanya Valley, Kapisa Province, Afghanistan, April 21, 2008, shortly before his unit, 3rd Platoon, Company A, Task Force Gladiator, Combined Joint Task Force 101, is attacked by a superior enemy force with heavy grenade, machine gun and rifle fire. (Photo Courtesy of the U.S. Army) • Army Reserve Spc. Gregory S. Ruske smiles as he returns to his vehicle after Soldiers from his unit and the Pennsylvania National Guard engaged with key leaders in a small village off main supply route Vermont in the Kapisa Province, Afghanistan, in June 2008. The Soldiers were able to reach the village only by climbing the steep rocky hills that surround it. (Photo Courtesy of the U.S. Army)