

HEROES

In the War on Terror

Each week the Defense Dept. highlights the military men and women who have gone above and beyond in the global war on terror.



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Williamston, N.C.
Silver Star recipient

North Carolina Army National Guard's Sgt. 1st Class Chad M. Stephens

Urban combat often devolves into a series of actions that traverse winding streets and narrow alleys--sometimes for hours. That was certainly the case for Sgt. 1st Class Stephens on June 24, 2004, in Baqubah. That morning, Stephens and his platoon were called in to assist another platoon taking heavy fire from insurgents. Stephens's platoon helped the others fight through the engagement and then proceeded further into Baqubah. And then they ran into the first ambush of the day. His company commander was severely wounded, and elements of the company disengaged to evacuate him--leaving an even slimmer force. Undaunted, Stephens's platoon fought through the ambush and continued the offensive as it wound through the city.

Then came a second ambush. In a barrage of fire from all directions, one of the Bradleys was disabled by an RPG round--leaving a wounded man trapped in the open. As enemies continued to pour down a heavy stream of fire, Stephens leapt from his vehicle and sprinted 50 meters in the open to reach the injured soldier. As rounds ricocheted off the metal, Stephens climbed into the open hatch to pull the soldier out of the wrecked vehicle. Medics crouched on the protected side of the vehicle, and Stephens lowered the injured man to them. He then ran back across the open space, dodging the enemies' fire. Stephens rallied his men and pushed on through the city, repelling numerous attacks as they evacuated the wounded soldier. Despite an injury, Stephens led his men to the opposite side of the city to a nearby base, where they hoped to save their downed man. Unfortunately, his wounds were too grave. For his selfless act in retrieving a fellow soldier while under enemy fire, Stephens was awarded the Silver Star on Oct. 22, 2006.



Parker, Colo.
*Navy and Marine Corps
Achievement Medal recipient*

Marine Corps Sgt. Chadwick L. Winegar

One of the key goals for remnants of the Taliban is to prevent a democratic government from succeeding in Afghanistan. In the Kunar province, the lead-up to the 2005 elections was a time of robust Coalition operations to thwart an increasingly brazen enemy. As part of a patrol, then-Cpl. Winegar and his platoon found themselves confronting numerous enemies who attacked by stealth and under the cover of darkness. On the nights of both August 15th and 16th, insurgents ambushed Winegar's convoy as it traversed the rugged Pech River Road. In both attacks, enemy fighters fired RPGs from a nearby ridgeline, followed by a hail of machine-gun fire. Winegar not only commanded the lead vehicle, but he manned its machine gun. On both nights, while cut off from his Combat Anti Armor Team, he unleashed his weapon on the ridgeline, holding back the Taliban to give the rest of his convoy time to set up a defense and return fire.

In November 2005, Winegar again faced danger--again as part of an ambushed convoy. On the morning of the 17th, his platoon's convoy came under heavy fire, and Winegar saw RPGs heading straight toward his vehicle. He ducked into the turret to avoid the inevitable; fortunately, the RPGs landed a few feet off target. Without pausing to consider his good fortune, he grabbed his machine gun and returned fire. Even though his convoy was cut off from other units, Winegar's quick reactions and responsive fire allowed it to push through the ambush without backup. For his actions, Winegar was twice awarded the Navy and Marine Corps Achievement Medal with a Combat "V" in August and September, 2006.