

# Soldier helps save lives during mall shooting

By Don Kramer  
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A Fort Lewis, Wash., NCO received a Soldier's Medal Dec. 13, 2006, from the Army's senior civilian for saving the lives of a man and several children in a 2005 shooting incident at a local mall.

Secretary of the Army Frances J. Harvey began I Corps' annual mission training briefing by pinning the Army's highest non-combat award for valor on the chest of Staff Sgt. Moises Martinez of A Company, 2nd Battalion, 23rd Infantry Regiment.

Because of Martinez's actions, no one died in the Nov. 20, 2005, incident at Tacoma Mall, which evolved into a standoff between a disturbed 20-year-old man with an assault rifle and SWAT teams from the Tacoma police department. Seven people were wounded during the shooting spree.

Martinez, then 29 and already an Iraq war veteran, administered first aid for more than an hour to the most seriously wounded victim.

Martinez's regimental affiliation led him to the Tacoma Mall that day. He had recently been assigned from 1st to 2nd Battalion in the 23rd Infantry Regiment – the "Tomahawks." He stopped by the mall to buy a souvenir tomahawk to commemorate his transfer between battalions within the regiment. He heard shots almost as soon as he walked in the door of the Excaliber Cutlery store.

The shooter, Dominick Maldonado, began firing a rifle indiscriminately while walking backward down the mall's main concourse. He hit a mix of shoppers and employees as they scrambled for the exits.

The sudden volley started a drama during which Maldonado took four hostages and stood off police for 90 minutes.

With the deranged shooter close by, Martinez ran across the concourse to two terrified children, shielding them while spiring them out of the mall. Martinez then turned and went back inside, fighting through crowds pushing against him to escape. He found Dan McKown, the assistant manager of Excaliber, bleeding profusely from five wounds, the worst two in his abdomen.

Trained as a combat lifesaver, Martinez took control of first aid for McKown from frightened mall employees. Though the shooter had stationed himself and his hostages in a music store only 15 meters away, Martinez remained with the victim, staunching the bleeding and keeping him calm until Maldonado ultimately surrendered to police.

McKown, still in a wheelchair a year later, attended the ceremony at the Fort Lewis Battle Command Training Center.

"He lied to me," McKown joked to reporters after the ceremony. "He told me, 'You're going to be fine. I've been to Iraq, and I've seen far worse than this and those guys pulled through.' Things like that."

McKown's left leg remains paralyzed due to spinal injuries, but his right leg has substantially healed. The two men have become close friends since the incident.

"I've told him since Day 1 that he is going to walk," Martinez said. "He's made a

lot of progress. I keep telling him he's another miracle that I've seen."

Martinez said he never expected this much attention, particularly from someone like the Secretary of the Army.

Harvey echoed the Army's new advertising slogan in his remarks at the presentation: "Sergeant Martinez demonstrated that he is strong enough to always do the right thing, however difficult the path."

He said Martinez was strong in mind in not breaking under pressure, in spirit by never accepting defeat, in heart by never forgetting those for whom he serves, in character by maintaining the highest ethical conduct and in purpose by ensuring the mission is always accomplished.

"And he is strong for our nation, excelling under harsh and deadly conditions," Harvey concluded.

The Soldier's Medal recipient admitted to being nervous at the presentation and forgetting his prepared text.

"This award, I'm honored to receive it," Martinez said. "But, I also dedicate it to those Soldiers out there that are in Iraq and Afghanistan or have served anywhere, who've done their best, gave it all ... everyone that has served."



Photo by Jason Kaye

Staff Sgt. Moises Martinez of A Co., 2nd Battalion, 23rd Infantry Regiment, and Dan McKown look at Martinez's citation after he was awarded the Soldier's Medal.