



Three NCOs among U.S. Army Africa Soldiers honored for bravery

By Rick Scavetta
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Six Soldiers – including three noncommissioned officers – were honored for their bravery more than a year after being ambushed.

Early July 13, 2008, about 200 insurgents attacked a vehicle patrol base in Wanat, Afghanistan. Nine Soldiers died, but Soldiers from Chosen Company, 2nd Battalion, 503rd Infantry Regiment, gallantly fought to defend their comrades.

Those men received medals of valor for their actions that morning. Maj. Gen. William B. Garrett III, commander of U.S. Army Africa, presented medals to the Soldiers during a March 20 ceremony held at Caserma Ederle, Vicenza, Italy.

Receiving the Silver Star was bittersweet, said Spc. Jeffrey Scantlin, 24, of Anchorage, Alaska.

“It’s a big deal. But it brings back a lot of memories of people who should be here but aren’t,” Scantlin said. “For me, the medal is more of a group achievement, something I wear to remind me of those who didn’t come back.”

The Silver Star Medal was also presented to Sgt. 1st Class Erich Phillips and Sgt. John Hayes. Bronze Star Medals with “V” device for valor were awarded to 1st Lt. Aaron Thurman, Sgt. Hector Chavez and Spc. Tyler Hanson.

As the ceremony began, the 173rd Airborne Brigade Combat Team stood silently to remember those who died. Then, Garrett spoke about the bravery Soldiers displayed during the battle.

“Their courage under fire, valor and loyalty to each other was absolutely astounding,” Garrett said.

The platoon was near the end of a long deployment in Afghanistan, having endured many firefights along the way. The morning of the battle, the Taliban surrounded the remote base and its observation post. Insurgents then attacked the village and its surrounding farmland.

American heavy munitions were destroyed, U.S. lines were broken and the base was invaded. Faced with enemy fire near Wanat – outnumbered and, in some cases, wounded – the paratroopers fought desperately for each other, overcoming fear and willingly risking their lives to save others, Garrett said.

Soon after, the Taliban insurgents were repelled by artillery



Photo by Barbara Romano

Maj. Gen. William B. Garrett III, commander of U.S. Army Africa, speaks with Spc. Jeffrey Scantlin, 24, of Anchorage, Alaska, after presenting him with the Silver Star during a March 20 ceremony at Caserma Ederle, Vicenza, Italy. Also pictured, from left, are Sgt. 1st Class Erich Phillips and Sgt. John Hayes.

and aircraft.

“Incredible acts of courage and valor were commonplace on the battlefield that day,” Garrett said. “Today, we recognize these six Soldiers for their courage. We are thankful for the opportunity to serve with such men.”

Garrett stepped forward and orders were read detailing each of their actions. The six paratroopers paused for photos, the bright ribbons and shining stars standing out against their green-gray digital fatigues.

Scantlin, like most of those awarded, knew he had been nominated for a medal. Other Soldiers learned the same day. But it meant little to them at the time, still reeling from the combat they had endured.

“We just lost nine guys. Everyone was still in shock. It was surreal – it still is,” Scantlin said. “The guys who died there were my friends.”



Read another story about the Battle of Wanat in the September 2009 issue of the NCO Journal or visit <https://usasma.bliss.army.mil/NCOJournal/default.asp>.