



Ranger receives Silver Star for saving fellow Soldiers

By Tracy A. Bailey
75th Ranger Regiment Public Affairs

A squad leader with the 75th Ranger Regiment was awarded the Silver Star for risking his life to save two fellow Rangers in Afghanistan. The award ceremony took place Dec. 2, 2009, at Fort Benning, Ga.

“The Soldier’s Creed says, ‘I will never leave a fallen comrade.’ I had to get my brothers and the most important thing in my mind was how hurt they were,” said Staff Sgt. Michael E. Norton of Alpha Company, 3rd Battalion.

Norton led his squad on an objective, Aug. 4 to 5, 2009, to raid an enemy combatant’s headquarters camp in the mountains of northwestern Khowst province in Afghanistan.

While moving to the objective, Norton and one of his team leaders were alerted to possible enemy combatants along the route and moved forward to assess the situation. As Norton and his team leader were attempting to identify the possible enemy in the valley, a seven- to nine-man enemy element initiated an ambush on the squad.

“The fire came from 12 o’clock and then, maybe a couple of seconds later, from our right and left,” Norton said.

Two more enemy combatants on the slope of the valley to the west engaged the Ranger squad with an AK-47 and rocket-propelled grenades. Another group of enemy fighters on elevated terrain to the east raked them with small arms fire.

The multiple enemy positions had effectively enveloped Norton’s squad at a distance of 25 to 50 meters, leaving Norton and his element pinned to the floor of the valley by the intense and accurate small-arms fire.

The valley left no room for maneuver; Norton, his squad and the machine-gun team element behind them immediately returned fire, but they were unable to gain fire superiority over the well-established enemy.

After the second volley of rocket-propelled grenades

knocked two of his rangers temporarily unconscious and blasted the rest of his squad with shrapnel and debris, Norton shouted for his squad to break contact.

When Norton realized that two of them had not gotten up and were still exposed to the heavy volume of enemy fire, and with complete disregard for his own safety, he turned around and purposefully charged back into the interlocking fire of the enemy ambush kill zone.

“The example of personal courage that Staff Sgt. Norton showed to get his men out of the kill zone is a testament to his character,” said Maj. Keith Carter, A Company’s commander.

Without hesitation, Norton dove down into the midst of enemy fire with his unconscious comrades, uncertain of their status, Carter said.

Lying next to the rangers, while the rest of the element attempted to suppress the enemy, Norton “started shaking and yelling as quietly as I could.”

After reviving his rangers, Norton led them back to cover through the hail of direct fire and rocket-propelled grenade strikes, bringing his entire squad out of the enemy onslaught intact.

“I’m proud of the actions of my squad, because we continued the mission after that,” said Norton.

As his platoon fought off the enemy ambush with direct fire, mortars and close air support, Norton quickly assessed his casualties and reorganized his squad to return to the fight.

Norton continued leading his squad in the follow-on assaults through two more direct-fire contacts, killing two enemy combatants.

“We receive a lot of great training here and I was just acting on instinct,”

said Norton.

The training conducted by rangers means everything on the battlefield, Carter said.

“The goal of the company and battalion is to create the most realistic scenarios possible while minimizing risk,” he said.



Photo by Tracy A. Bailey

Staff Sgt. Michael E. Norton stands in front of the Ranger Memorial at Fort Benning in November 2009.