

# NCO Stories

*A selection of Valor*



## *Sgt. 1st Class Jack White* *Citation to award the Distinguished Service Cross*

*The President of the United States of America, authorized by Act of Congress July 9, 1918, takes pleasure in presenting the Distinguished Service Cross to Staff Sgt. Jack E. White, United States Army, for extraordinary heroism in action.*

*Staff Sgt. White distinguished himself by acts of gallantry and intrepidity above and beyond the call of duty while serving as a squad leader with Company A, 1st Battalion (Airborne), 503rd Infantry Regiment, during combat operations against an armed enemy in Khost province, Afghanistan, on June 29, 2008.*

*That night, Staff Sgt. White's 19-man observation post was assaulted by a 105-man anti-Afghanistan force employing rocket-propelled grenades and coordinated small-arms fire. As the attack commenced, Staff Sgt. White was awoken by a rocket-propelled grenade impacting less than 20 meters from his position.*

*He immediately low-crawled out of the sleeping area in order to lead the observation post's defense. Maneuvering through heavy enemy fire, Staff Sgt. White quickly adjusted his men to repel the brunt of the attacking force.*

*With no regard for his own safety, he worked his way from Soldier to Soldier in order to interlock all fires and mark targets, all while engaging and being engaged by the enemy. He ordered multiple danger-close fire missions through his forward observer and incorporated lethal mortar and artillery fire on the enemy elements.*

*His leadership and fearless tactical maneuvering allowed his men to interdict all attacking forces attempting to overrun their position, ultimately leading the enemy to break contact and retreat.*

*Staff Sgt. White's selfless leadership, courageous actions, and extraordinary devotion to duty are in keeping with the finest traditions of military service and reflect great credit upon himself, the 1st Battalion (Airborne), 503rd Infantry Regiment, and the United States Army.*

# NCO awarded Army's second-highest decoration

By Vince Little  
Fort Benning Public Affairs Office

On the night of June 29, 2008, Sgt. 1st Class Jack White and 18 other Soldiers were awoken by the sound of rocket-propelled grenades near their tiny observation post in Afghanistan, close to the Pakistan border.

One of the grenades landed less than 20 meters away, and more than 100 Taliban fighters were attacking the Soldiers with small-arms fire and RPK machine guns.

Quickly taking action, White crawled out of his sleeping area to head the observation point's defense against the insurgents.

Maneuvering through heavy enemy fire, White engaged and quickly adjusted his men to repel the attacking force, his award citation states. With no regard for his own safety, he ordered multiple "danger-close" fire missions, called in airstrikes and directed lethal mortar and artillery launches.

For his leadership, White, now an airborne school instructor, was awarded the Distinguished Service Cross, the military's second-highest decoration. The honor was presented during a ceremony on the hallowed ground of the 173rd Airborne Memorial at the National Infantry Museum, Fort Benning, Ga. White was surrounded by his family, fellow Soldiers from the 173rd Airborne Brigade and the Fort Benning community.

White's unit also earned seven Army Commendation Medals and a Bronze Star, all with "V" devices for valor.

During the ceremony, White spoke of the unity and strength of his small tactical unit and squad, and of the human dimension of combat.

"You don't really think. You just think about what you have to do at the time," said White, who was a staff sergeant when the incident occurred. "It ain't like the movies; it ain't fun. It's the last place you want to be, honestly. But your training takes over, and you start thinking about the guy to the left and right of you, and [you want to] make sure everybody gets out of there safe. If it weren't for my guys that were up there ... I wouldn't be speaking to you today."

Command Sgt. Maj. Rick Weik, who was the battalion's command sergeant major and now heads the 198th Infantry Brigade, said the attack on the Soldiers that night could have turned bad very easily, but White's leadership helped them prevail.

The fight lasted more than an hour, and the enemy eventually broke contact and retreated, said Col. Michael Fenzel, then a lieutenant colonel who led White's battalion in Afghanistan and is now commander of the 2nd Brigade Combat Team, 1st Armored Division, at Fort Bliss, Texas. He said the Taliban fighters attacked in waves on the main combat outpost below them and emanated from six other directions.

"The other attacks were designed to isolate OP East so it could be destroyed, but the enemy hadn't taken into account the



Photo by Lori Egan

Col. Michael Fenzel, 2nd Brigade Combat Team, 1st Armored Division commander, pins the Distinguished Service Cross on Sgt. 1st Class Jack White, an Airborne School instructor with 1st Battalion (Airborne), 507th Parachute Infantry Regiment, Sept. 7 at the National Infantry Museum, Fort Benning, Ga.

expertise, the cool and violent response under the direction of one man. ... Jack's own personal actions, bravery and leadership are the reason why 18 other American Soldiers are alive today," he said. "Jack White became a hero to those who served with him long before the evening of June 29 on Observation Point East. Heroes are made long before events thrust them into a position to have to act."

Maj. Gen. Michael Ferriter, the Maneuver Center of Excellence and Fort Benning commanding general, called White the epitome of inspired leadership. He said heroic actions can serve as lessons learned.

White has been on four deployments — three to Afghanistan and one to Iraq. The Distinguished Service Cross wouldn't be possible without the actions of his comrades, he said.

"All my guys who were up on the OP with me, I wish they were here today," he said. This is "mainly for them. That's how I see this award, not for me, but for everybody."