

NCO Stories

A selection of Valor



Sergeant receives Silver Star after six-hour attack

By Sgt. Blair Neelands
10th Mountain Division

A 10th Mountain Division Soldier with the 1st Brigade Combat Team received the Silver Star Medal, the nation's third highest award for valor in combat, during a ceremony Feb. 16 at Forward Operating Base Khilligay in northern Afghanistan.

Sgt. Joshua R. Labbe, from Stonington, Conn., an infantry squad leader with 1st Battalion, 87th Infantry Regiment, is credited with saving the life of one Soldier and protecting numerous other Soldiers during a complex attack that lasted more than six hours.

"We are here to recognize the sacrifice and courage of the Soldiers and leaders in Shafi Khel on Oct. 6," said Lt. Col. Russell Lewis, 1-87 Infantry's commander, during the ceremony.



"Sgt. Labbe is a hero; he didn't go out ... to earn an award, he just did his job — except his job that day called for extraordinary actions, and he stepped up and helped his comrades."

Labbe's platoon was conducting a joint combat patrol in the village of Shafi Khel, in Baghlan province, with its Afghan National Security Force partners.

While establishing an observation post on a hilltop, Labbe and Soldiers from 1st Squad as well as the mortar team came under enemy fire. Initially, the enemy attacked the Soldiers of 3rd Platoon with rocket-propelled grenades.

"One truck of ours was hit by an RPG," Labbe said. "When I saw that truck get hit, I [immediately] started suppressing with the mortar system."

Over the next four hours, the platoon came

under RPG and small-arms fire. Labbe directed Soldiers on the hill to return fire with multiple weapons systems. The hilltop then came under sniper fire, forcing Labbe and the other Soldiers to take cover in holes they had dug.

Later, Labbe was told to collapse their position on the hilltop and return to the base of the hill where the remainder of his platoon was located.

"I had to get out of my hole and run to the other hole where the mortar system was," he said. "When I got to the hole, I got everyone one up, got them on line and got everybody ready. As soon as we got out of the hole, we got sniper fire again."

With three of the five Soldiers making it safely across the hill to the other hole, Labbe and Pfc. Parker Radatz were forced to return to the mortar hole due to the accuracy of the sniper fire. Labbe and Radatz gathered themselves and attempted to get across the hill again.

"I ran to my hole thinking he was right beside me; little did I know, he had actually tripped and fell," Labbe said. "I turned around, and I saw him trying to get his composure to get back up. But, he couldn't because there were multiple rounds impacting all around him."

With complete disregard for his own safety, Labbe ran across the exposed hilltop to the fallen Soldier through enemy fire, picked him up and took him to safety.

"I just did what I had to in that situation," Labbe said. "He has people who care for him and love him; I knew I had to go pick him up and get him to safety. It's my job to take care of my men."

Later, as the platoon moved down the road, the tow bar pulling the battle-damaged vehicle snapped. While Labbe and three Soldiers began repairing the tow bar, once again the platoon came under small-arms fire from nearby rooftops and walls. Labbe immediately returned fire with his M4 rifle.

The small-arms fire stopped for a moment, allowing Labbe to run back to his vehicle to retrieve an M249 squad automatic weapon. He moved to a position that allowed him to provide security down an alley and the walls from which they had received fire. At this point, enemy fighters hopped over the walls and began engaging the platoon again.

With the enemy less than 20 meters away, Labbe stood completely exposed on the road and continued to shield the recovery crew as he fired the machine gun from his shoulder. After expending the 200-round ammunition pouch, he had to resort to using his 30-round M4 rifle magazines.

"I engaged them for roughly two minutes and continued to pull security until the tow bar was fixed," he said.

Once the vehicle was recovered, 3rd Platoon Soldiers continued down the road until they were ambushed. While still in close contact with the enemy, another convoy vehicle suddenly plunged into an irrigation ditch. Labbe immediately dismounted and moved under fire to the stuck vehicle.

He coordinated the evacuation and recovery of the vehicle while still being engaged with RPG and machine-gun fire from compounds and tree lines less than 100 meters away. Labbe remained exposed to the enemy until the rest of the platoon re-



Photo by Sgt. Blair Neelands

Sgt. Joshua R. Labbe, from Stonington, Conn., and an infantry squad leader with 1st Battalion, 87th Infantry Regiment from the 10th Mountain Division's 1st Brigade Combat Team, received the Silver Star during a ceremony at Forward Operating Base Khilligay, Afghanistan, Feb. 16. Labbe is credited with saving the life of one soldier and protecting numerous soldiers during a complex attack which lasted more than six hours.

covered the vehicle and mounted back in their trucks.

"I feel honored to receive the Silver Star," he said. "However, I don't think just my actions alone allowed us to be victorious that day. It was the whole platoon. Everyone who was out there that day played an important role in getting everyone back here alive. I couldn't have done what I did that day without my brothers in 3rd Platoon."

Over the course of more than six hours of close combat, Labbe went above and beyond the call of duty as a squad leader, Lewis said.

"Today we recognize his actions because they are not common," he said. "His actions that day distinguished him from others and truly impacted the outcome of the fight in Shafi Khel."