

# Soldier is second female to receive Silver Star since WWII

By Sgt. Micah E. Clare  
4th BCT, 82nd Airborne Division

Heroes are made, not born. And a hero like Army Sgt. Monica Brown is no different.

Then-Spc. Brown, recognized for her gallant actions during combat in Afghanistan in 2007, is the second female soldier since World War II to receive a Silver Star, the third-highest award given for valor in enemy action. She received the medal from Vice President Richard B. Cheney at Bagram Air Base, Afghanistan, during a ceremony March 20, 2008.

It was dusk on April 25, 2007, when Brown, a medic from the 82nd Airborne Division's 782nd Brigade Support Battalion, 4th Brigade Combat Team, was on a routine security patrol along the rolling, rocky plains of the isolated Jani Khail district in Afghanistan's Paktika province when insurgents attacked her convoy.

"We'd been out on the mission for a couple of days," said Brown, who at the time was attached to the brigade's 4th Squadron, 73rd Cavalry Regiment's Troop C. "We had just turned into a wadi, an empty river bed, when our gunner yelled that the vehicle behind us had hit an improvised explosive device."

The Soldiers looked out of their windows in time to see one of the struck vehicle's tires flying through the field next to them. Brown had just opened her door to see what was going on when the attack began.

"I saw smoke from the vehicle when, suddenly, we started taking small-arms fire from all around us," she said. "Our gunner starting firing back, and my platoon sergeant yelled, 'Doc! Let's go.'"

Brown and her platoon sergeant, Staff Sgt. Jose Santos, exited their vehicle, and while under fire, ran a few hundred meters to the site of the downed humvee.

"Everyone was already out of the



burning vehicle," she said. "But even before I got there, I could tell that two of them were injured very seriously."

In fact, all five of the passengers who had stumbled out were burned and cut. Two Soldiers, Spcs. Stanson Smith and Larry Spray, suffered life-threatening injuries.

With help from two less-injured vehicle crewmen, Sgt. Zachary Tellier and Spc. Jack Bodani, Brown moved the immobile Soldiers to a relatively safe distance from the burning humvee.

"There was pretty heavy incoming fire at this point," she said.

"Rounds were literally missing her by inches," said Bodani, who provided suppressive fire as Brown aided the casualties while injured. "We needed to get away from there."

Attempting to provide proper medical

care under the heavy fire became impossible, especially when the attackers stepped up efforts to kill the Soldiers.

"Another vehicle had just maneuvered to our position to shield us from the rounds now exploding in the fire from the humvee behind us," Brown said. "Somewhere in the mix, we started taking mortar rounds. It became a huge commotion, but all I could let myself think about were my patients."

With the other vehicles spread out in a crescent formation, Brown and her casualties were stuck with nowhere to go. Suddenly, Santos arrived with one of the unit's vehicles, backed it up to their position, and Brown began loading the wounded soldiers inside.

"We took off to a more secure location several hundred meters away, where we were able to call in the medical evacuation," Brown said.

She then directed other combat lifesaver-qualified Soldiers to help by holding intravenous bags and assisting her in preparing the casualties for evacuation.

After what seemed like an eternity, Brown said, the attackers finally began retreating, and she was able to perform more thorough aid procedures before the helicopter finally arrived to transport the casualties to safety.

Two hours after the initial attack, everything was over.

In the darkness, Brown recalled standing in a field, knee-deep in grass, her only source of light coming from her red headlight, trying to piece together the events that had just taken place.

"Looking back, it was just a blur of noise and movement," the Lake Jackson, Texas, native said. "What just happened? Did I do everything right? It was a hard thing to think about."

Before joining the Army at the age of 17, the bright-eyed young woman said she never pictured herself being in a

situation like this. Originally wanting to be an X-ray technician, she changed her mind when she realized that by becoming a medic, she'd be in the best place to help people.

"At first, I didn't think I could do it," she said. "I was actually afraid of blood. When I saw my first airway-opening operation, I threw up."

She quickly adjusted to her job and received additional training both before and during her deployment to Afghanistan.

"I realized that everything I had done during the attack was just rote memory," she said. "Kudos to my chain of command for that. I know with training like I was given, any medic would have done the same in my position."

"To say she handled herself well would be an understatement," Bodani said. "It was amazing to see her keep completely calm and take care of our guys with all that going on around her. Of all the medics we've had with us throughout the year, she was the one I trusted the most."

Earning trust with a combat unit is not something easily earned, said Capt. Todd Book, Troop C's commander at the time of the attack. But, it was something Brown had taken upon herself to prove long before the Jani Khail ambush.

"Our regular medic was on leave

at the time," Book said. "We had other medics to choose from, but Brown had shown us that she was more technically proficient than any of her peers."

Having people call her "Doc" means a lot to Brown because of the trust it engenders.

"When people I've treated come back to me later and tell me the difference I was able to make in their life it's the best part of this job," she said.

During her rest and recuperation leave in May 2008, Brown visited Spray in the hospital and met his mother.

"I almost cried," Brown said. "Spray's mother was so thankful, and she hugged me. That was the moment that made me feel the best about what I did."

Even though she felt proud when she was informed that she was going to receive a Silver Star, she considers her actions to be the result of effort put into her by everyone she's worked for.

"While I'm not scared to get my hands dirty, I have to say that I never fully became a medic until I came over here and did it first hand," she said. "I just reacted when the time came."

Due to her quick and selfless actions, both Smith and Spray survived their injuries.



**Opposite page:** Then-Spc. Monica Brown gets awarded the Silver Star at Bagram Air Field, Afghanistan, by Vice President Dick Cheney for her actions on April 25, 2007, during a combat patrol.

Photo by Pfc. Scott Davis

**Above:** Brown, a medic from 782nd Brigade Support Battalion, 4th Brigade Combat Team, 82nd Airborne Division, is the second woman since World War II to earn a Silver Star award for gallantry in combat.

Photo by Spc. Micah E. Clare

**Left:** Brown takes an Afghan boy's blood at the hospital in Forward Operating Base Salerno, Afghanistan.

Photo by Spc. Micah E. Clare

