

# NCO Stories

*A selection of Valor*



## *Rangers recognized for combat action in Afghanistan*

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With the quiet, picturesque Puget Sound as a backdrop, members of 2nd Battalion, 75th Ranger Regiment, were distinguished April 29 for the first time in a public setting for exceptional gallantry while engaged in recent combat operations in Afghanistan.

Lt. Col. Dave Hodne, the battalion commander, awarded two Bronze Stars for valor; 11 Army Commendation Medals for valor; four Joint Service Commendation Medals for valor; 16 Purple Hearts; five Orders of Saint Maurice; and one Order of Saint Martin on the stadium grounds at Stadium High School in Tacoma, Wash. Ten rangers who couldn't be present also received awards.

The Order of Saint Maurice is special to the infantry community and recognizes individuals who, in the eyes of their senior leadership, have contributed significantly to the infantry and served it with distinction. The Order of Saint Martin singles out those who have rendered conspicuous, long-term service to the Army Quartermaster Corps.

Hodne's decision to honor his rangers in the local community — marking the battalion's first-ever recognition ceremony outside Joint Base Lewis-McChord — was simple: to give the rangers some much-needed face time with the public.

"It's too easy to do an award ceremony in the confines of the unit area in front of our families. But it's important that the community see these guys, because they give so much to their country and their nation," Hodne said.

Hodne said there were civilians who showed up that otherwise wouldn't have been afforded the opportunity had the ceremony been held on-post.

"There were some civilians from the local community who showed up because they heard about it through word-of-mouth," he said.

"A lot of rangers live off post, and their neighbors don't have access to the installation. They invited some of them out here," he added.

In the true fashion of most heroes, Sgt. 1st Class Eric Echavarria, a platoon sergeant with the battalion who was awarded the Bronze Star for valor for outstanding leadership during combat operations in Kandahar province last fall, said he did nothing more than what was expected of him.

"I don't think I was doing anything other than what I should have been doing. It was my job," said Echavarria, who was quick to assemble a landing zone for the medical evacuation of a wounded comrade and continued to lead security and litter teams to the landing zone before personally signaling the incoming evacuation helicopter, even though it exposed him for several minutes to a barrage of enemy fire.

“I know they (the other rangers) would have done it for me just the same way,” he added. “There are other guys who deserve the same recognition because they went out into that hot area just like I did, knowing the risk.”

Capt. Brendan McCarthy, Echavarria’s platoon leader during the operation, doesn’t necessarily agree with Echavarria’s modesty.

“Just because everyone here (the 2nd Battalion, 75th Ranger Regiment rangers) would do it doesn’t mean it’s not a valorous act,” McCarthy said of his platoon sergeant’s exceptional courage. “Everyone here would do it because everyone here would gladly put their life on the line for another ranger.”

“Any normal person probably wouldn’t,” he added.

McCarthy refers to the rangers on Joint Base Lewis-McChord as “dark matter” — something most people don’t fully understand, if at all.

“Being in the ranger battalion, a lot of people don’t really know what we do or who we are,” he said.

For this reason, McCarthy says, it’s good for the public to witness the unit and know of its accomplishments — its uniqueness.

“It’s nice to see the unit publicly recognized,” he said.

“Just being put out here on public forum, I think that’s the best thing.”

“For me, personally, it’s not about being awarded. It’s about recognizing the unit,” he added. “It’s about showcasing ourselves and that we are something special.”

As the words of the coveted Ranger Creed roared from the mouths of hundreds of combat-proven rangers, echoing between a canyon of high-rising concrete bleachers, wives gazed upon beloved husbands; children upon fathers; a proud community upon a group of extraordinary Soldiers who are perhaps now a little less mysterious.

“This is the template for the 2nd Ranger Battalion,” Hodne said of the ceremony. “We’re the Pacific Northwest Rangers, and doing this in a venue with the Puget Sound behind us — there’s nothing more fitting.”



**Above:** Lt. Col. Dave Hodne, the commander of 2nd Battalion, 75th Ranger Regiment at Joint Base Lewis-McChord, Wash., shakes hands with one of the battalion’s noncommissioned officers after pinning a Purple Heart on him April 29 during an award ceremony at Stadium High School in Tacoma, to recognize the valorous combat actions of 46 members of the battalion. The event marked the very first award ceremony the battalion has ever held off-post and in a public setting. The colonel recognized 39 Soldiers with various awards and commendations during the ceremony.



Hodne pins a Bronze Star on Sgt. 1st Class Eric Echavarria, who distinguished himself last fall during combat operations in Kandahar province, Afghanistan.