

Rangers receive medals for combat valor

By Rick Wood
Northwest Guardian

Valor and sacrifice were recognized during a combat awards ceremony June 10 for members of the 2nd Battalion, 75th Ranger Regiment, at Joint Base Lewis-McChord, Wash.

The rain broke just as the Rangers lined up in formation to honor 21 of their own.

Chaplain Maj. David Curlin started the ceremony by reflecting on courage and service.

“As we commend the courage and valor of these men and acknowledge the spirit of selflessness in each heroic deed, we pray that selflessness and courageous spirit these men have manifested will characterize our own lives on and off the battlefield,” Curlin said.

Col. Mark Odom, the battalion commander, said the actions of the Rangers being recognized defined valor.

“The frequency of our deployments and the length of our nation’s wars has sadly relegated these heroic actions to commonplace — exceptional service to standard,” Odom said. “The actions of our Rangers in combat are neither common nor simply the standard.”

Defining valor means knowing the difference between acts of self-preservation and true heroism, he said.

“The [actions] we recognize today are conscious ones and uniquely counterintuitive,” Odom said.

Odom pointed to the example of Staff Sgt. Austin McCall, who despite being wounded and facing continuous insurgent threat, led his team forward into the face of battle and successfully completed the mission.

“The natural reaction is to seek cover,” Odom said. “His actions allowed the rest of his squad to enter the compound safely.”

During the battle, fragments from a grenade went through McCall’s face, Odom said.

“However, McCall continued to clear the compound,” he said.

Wanting to rejoin his team after being evacuated for medical treatment, McCall returned to duty in Afghanistan, approximately one month after being wounded, Odom said.

“That is amazing,” Odom said.

For his actions, McCall received a Bronze Star Medal with “V” device for valor and a Purple Heart for being wounded.

“It means a lot more to me than I could ever talk about. But what really means the most is that I’m a Ranger, and my fellow Rangers are living with me in that compound and doing the things they do and living the Ranger Creed,” McCall said.

McCall is still recovering from his wounds and faces reconstructive surgery on his shattered jaw.

However, if duty calls, he is ready to serve again, he said.

“It’s an honor to serve my country,” McCall said.

McCall was one of two Rangers awarded the Bronze Star Medal for valor during the ceremony. Twelve more Rangers received Bronze Stars for meritorious service. Four Rangers [including McCall] received Purple Hearts.

Six Soldiers received Army Commendation Medals with “V” device for valor, and three received the Order of Saint Maurice, awarded by the National Infantry Association and the Chief of Infantry for outstanding contribution to the infantry.



Photo by Ingrid Barrentine, Northwest Guardian

Staff Sgt. Austin McCall received the Bronze Star Medal with “V” device for valor and the Purple Heart during a combat awards ceremony June 10. McCall and 23 Rangers from the 2nd Battalion, 75th Ranger Regiment, were recognized for their combat actions. Among the awards presented were the Bronze Star Medals and Army Commendation Medals for valor, Purple Hearts and Bronze Star Medals for service.