

Recruiter saves life on interstate

By Len Butler
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When Staff Sgt. Marcus A. Stone, a recruiter in Denton, Texas, saw cars braking and swerving suddenly ahead of him on Interstate 35E in Dallas, he knew something bad had just happened.

In the minutes that followed, Stone prevented the accident from becoming deadly when he pulled a victim from a burning vehicle.

Those actions that day last December prompted Stone's commanding officer to nominate Stone for the Noncommissioned Officers Association of the United States of America Military Vanguard award that was presented during the week of July 11. The award, presented annually to recognize one noncommissioned officer or petty officer from each of the uniformed services for acts of heroism, honors those individuals who have performed a particularly heroic act that resulted in the saving of a life or the prevention of serious injury.

Stone, 28, was driving an Army applicant through the Dallas suburb of Farmers Branch to the Denton Recruiting Station when he saw the accident. Moving to the high-occupancy-vehicle lane, he got around the stopped cars and saw several crashed vehicles with one of them emitting flames and leaking gasoline.

"I was in the HOV lane and I saw the [burning] car facing oncoming traffic," Stone said. "I got out of my [government-owned vehicle] to go see if everyone was all right. That's when I noticed the flames underneath the car. Then I noticed the dripping fluid, and I realized that, sooner or later, that car was going to blow up."

Stone said the first thing he wanted to do was get all the motorists away from the immediate area. Some of them refused, preferring to stay with their cars or not wanting to move their cars to safety until police arrived.

"I told them, 'Look, this is what's going on over there,' pointing to the burning car," he said. "Once they realized there



Photo by Len Butler

Staff Sgt. Marcus A. Stone, a Denton, Texas, recruiter, saved a life and was honored with a Noncommissioned Officers Association of the United States of America Military Vanguard award in July.

could be more damage to their cars if the flames got out of control, in addition to their own personal safety, they started moving."

Stone said that's when he noticed that there was still a passenger in the burning car. The driver had just gotten out, but Stone could see the passenger wasn't moving.

"The first thing I thought of was, 'Why is this guy not making an effort to get out of the car?'" he said. "I ran back to my GOV to get the fire extinguisher, and when I turned around to go back, I heard a loud 'Whoosh!' and the fire had spread to engulf the front of the car as well as underneath it."

Stone ran back to the burning car and the helpless man inside. Flames kept him from going around to the passenger side of the car, so he had to reach into the car and grab the man from the driver's side. In spite of the danger, Stone said all he wanted to do was help the victim.

"The passenger was somewhat conscious, but it was obvious he was

traumatized from the accident and had a possible head injury," Stone said. "I knew he needed to get out of that car, whether he was going to help me or not. I certainly couldn't just allow him to burn in there."

With flames all around the car, Stone grabbed the man by his arm and pulled him out. Another motorist came to Stone's aid and helped pull the victim to safety. Almost immediately after Stone pulled the victim out of the burning vehicle, the car was completely engulfed in flames. Moments later, the fire department and police arrived.

Stone learned later from the investigating police officer that the victim was in good condition at a hospital and was expected to recover.

Officer Susan Sharp, from the Farmers Branch Police Department, was the investigating officer that day. Once firefighter, police and paramedics arrived, Stone gave the victim his recruiter business card and left the scene. It was only after Sharp compiled the various statements from witnesses and drivers involved in the accident, people who referred to Stone as "that Army guy," did she realize how crucial a role Stone played, Sharp said.

"Had Sgt. Stone not extricated (the victim), he would have burned to death within a minute or two," Sharp said. "Stone didn't just save a life. He was the difference between a group of bystanders seeing a man rescued by one of America's heroic Soldiers versus seeing the man die a horrific death, burning right before their eyes."

Stone, an Iraq combat veteran, said his Army training played a crucial role in his actions to save the man that day. His experience downrange, he explained, helped in that he was much calmer because he had already been exposed to pressure-packed situations in Iraq.

"It just comes down to being at the right place at the right time," he said. "I'm just glad that somebody was able to continue their life, and I'm thankful that I was able to help someone in that capacity."