

Woman Wins Silver Medal for Valor

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Staff Writer

(March 28, 2008) A Texas teen became the second female soldier since World War II to be awarded the nation's third highest medal of valor, the Silver Star, for her gallant actions during combat in Afghanistan last year.

Sargent Monica Lin Brown, 19, a Lake Jackson, Texas native was presented the Silver Star by Vice President Dick Cheney during a March 21 ceremony at Bagram Airfield in Afghanistan.

She received the award for the heroism she displayed during an attack on her convoy in April of last year.

Brown, a medic from the 782nd Brigade Support Battalion of the 82nd Airborne Division, was on a routine security patrol mission along the isolated and rocky plains of the Jani Khail District of Afghanistan when her convoy came under small-arms fire. At the same time, the vehicle directly behind her own hit an explosive device and blew apart.

Along with her platoon sergeant, Staff Sgt. Jose Santos, Brown left her vehicle and ran under fire to the destroyed vehicle.

"Everyone was already out of the burning vehicle," she told the *Army News Service*. "But even before I got there, I could tell that two of them were injured very seriously."

When she arrived on the scene, she found all five passengers to be burned and cut, and two soldiers with life threatening injuries. Two of the less injured crewmen, Sgt. Zachary Tellier and Specialist Jack Bodani helped Brown to move the two immobilized soldiers to a safe distance, but by then, the incoming gunfire was heavy.

"Rounds were literally missing her by inches," said Specialist Bodani, who provided suppressive fire for Brown as she began to treat the injured at the scene. "We needed to get away from there."

But it wasn't to be, at least not yet. "Somewhere in the mix, we started taking mortar rounds," Brown said. "It became a huge commotion, but all I could let myself think about were my patients."

For a time, they were actually pinned down by the gunfire, and she reportedly used her own body to shield the wounded soldiers while mortars fell less than 100 yards away. Although Pentagon policy prohibits women from serving in front-line combat roles, the nature of the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq have no real front lines and have seen women soldiers taking part in close-quarters combat much more than in previous conflicts.

This was certainly the case for Brown who was finally able to get the wounded soldiers into a vehicle and safely away from the scene.

After what seemed like an eternity, the insurgents finally began to retreat.

“It was amazing to see her keep completely calm and take care of our guys with all that going on around her,” Specialist Bodani said. “Of all the medics we've had with us throughout the year, she was the one I trusted the most.”

Brown wasn't so sure. Hours later, she was still trying to piece together what happened. “Looking back, it was just a blur of noise and movement,” she said. “What just happened? Did I do everything right? It was a hard thing to think about.”

By her own admission, being the recipient of a Silver Medal was the last thing she expected to happen when she joined the Army two years ago. She originally intended to be an X-ray technician but changed her mind when she realized that a medic was in a better position 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.”

As a result of her heroism, both of the soldiers who were seriously wounded in the attack survived their injuries.

While taking some rest and recuperation in May last year, she had the opportunity to visit one of the soldiers in the hospital and met his mother.

“I almost cried,” Brown said. “His mother was so thankful and she hugged me. That was the moment that made me feel the best about what I did.”

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