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Cool head, 'warrior ethos' guided Heidelberg medic who helped stabilize victims of autobahn crash

By Jennifer Walsh

Heidelberg Medical Department Activity Public Affairs Office

HEIDELBERG, Germany -- As Sgt. Latoddia S. Maze, a medic at the Heidelberg Health Center, pulled up to the crash scene, he saw a hand sticking out the sunroof.



JENNIFER WALSH

Sgt. Latoddia S. Maze takes Vencent Galvan's temperature during an exam at the Heidelberg (Germany) Health Center's family practice clinic, March 3.

It wasn't moving. Maze was on the autobahn early on the morning of March 2, returning to Heidelberg from Frankfurt International Airport. A car with two passengers had gone off the road and struck a tree moments before he arrived.

"I parked my car, got out of the car and ran up to the scene," Maze said. "I looked at the gentleman in the car. He was in the driver's seat and his leg was shaking. He was in the fetal position, so all I could see was basically

him going into shock. I yanked on the door, but I couldn't get the door open."

Maze borrowed a jack from another driver who had stopped to help, placed it between the window and the roof and was able to raise the roof a few inches. Although he could not get the driver out, he could get air into the vehicle.

"He (the driver) began to start breathing," Maze said. "But it was short, gasping breaths."

Unable to open the doors of the vehicle, Maze turned his attention to the female passenger whose hand he had seen protruding from the sunroof.

“I went up to her, grabbed her hand and felt for a pulse on her wrist. She had a weak pulse,” Maze said. “She wasn’t responding or saying anything to me, but I continued to tap on her leg trying to get her attention. Finally she moved her wrist. If her hand wasn’t out of the sunroof, I wouldn’t have been able to tell she still had some life in her.”

Maze’s initial actions helped keep the passengers stable. Approximately seven minutes later, Polizei, fire department and ambulance teams showed up. Maze gave them a detailed account of what he had already done to help the passengers. The rescue teams cut the vehicle open to free the passengers and transferred them to two helicopters for evacuation.

“Sgt. Maze was one of the first to come to the scene of the accident and provided first aid in an exemplary manner,” said Peter Watzl, the South Hessen Polizei Department superintendent.

Maze said his actions that morning were a product of his Army training and his devotion to saving lives.

“I basically took everything -- the ‘warrior ethos’ and everything -- and pulled it all into one and did what I had to do to save these people,” Maze said. “My Army training helped me because ... they teach us to adapt to situations. Even if you are nervous, you have to be cool, because there are other people who are depending on you.”

Maj. Claudia Peterson, head nurse for the clinic's family practice clinic and Maze’s supervisor, said the situation Maze was in was unusual, but his reaction to the event was not.

“A lot of people do drive by (accident scenes), but he’s trained to be a medic. He is in the military and he did what he’s trained to do,” Peterson said. “He’s an excellent NCO. I’m really proud of him.”

Although Maze has been in the Army since 2004, he has only been a medic for about a year. He got his Army start as an automated logistical specialist and later changed his career path when he re-enlisted.

“I’ve always loved medicine,” Maze said. “I had a lot of people in my past who died that could’ve been prevented if someone had the correct training. I figured I could be the one to do it.”

Maze became a medic following 16 weeks of advanced individual training at Fort Sam

Houston in San Antonio, Texas, in March 2008. He then made his way to Heidelberg’s family practice clinic, where he primarily works with active-duty servicemembers and Families. But he has a soft spot for local military retirees.

“There are a lot of retirees here and those guys did the same thing I did,” Maze said. “They sacrificed 20 years-plus. They deserve to have a medic who really cares about what he does and truly wants to be there for them.”

In the future, Maze plans to shift his focus to occupational therapy so he can aid Soldiers suffering from battlefield injuries.

“I’m fascinated with helping Soldiers out with this war,” Maze said. “My main goal is to make someone get out of bed and say, ‘Yes, I want to get up this morning. I don’t want to die.’”

In the meantime, Maze said he is happy working in Family Practice and even happier to continue being a Soldier. He plans to re-enlist this August.

“It goes past being a medic. It goes all the way to the basics of being a Soldier,” Maze said. “I wear this uniform with pride and I love what I do.”



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