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2009: THE YEAR OF THE NCO

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Sergeant earns Silver Star for charging into face of enemy during ambush in Afghanistan

By Sgt. Micah E. Clare

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BAMBERG, Germany -- Staff Sgt. Lincoln V. Dockery said he didn't even see the grenade that sent shrapnel into his right forearm while charging insurgent fighters in Afghanistan's Korengal valley, Nov. 16, 2007.

"Someone yelled out, and I looked up and saw it coming. My hand went up and a hot, sharp feeling went through," he said.

Dockery, a combat engineer then assigned to a route clearance patrol with Company A of the 173rd Airborne Brigade's Special Troops Battalion, said he decided the injury wasn't major, and continued his charge up a hill into enemy fire and earning a Silver Star for valor. The medal and a Purple Heart were awarded here, March 11.



SGT MICAH E. CLARE

Staff Sgt. Lincoln V. Dockery, a combat engineer with Headquarters and Headquarters Company, 173rd Airborne Brigade Special Troops Battalion, and his wife Dominika and daughter Pria, shortly after the ceremony in which the sergeant was awarded the Silver Star and Purple Heart in Bamberg, Germany, March 11.

"I don't want to think about what would have happened had he not been there," said Capt. William Cromie, Dockery's platoon leader that day in Afghanistan. "It would have been a completely different day. While described in the infantry field manual, and taught at every schoolhouse in our career, if asked to charge into an enemy, uphill and within hand grenade range, most people only know yes as a book answer."

Dockery said the description of the mission for which the patrol departed from Forward Operating Base Asadabad in Kunar Province that day sounded like the description of their mission for any other day: “Out looking for bombs.”

“My only concern was for the guys who worked under me,” the 25-year-old Runnemedo, N.J., native stated.

His concern became reality when the lead vehicle on the mission, a Husky mine-detecting vehicle, activated an improvised explosive device. Rocket-propelled grenades immediately started hitting the damaged vehicle and it became clear the convoy was in the middle of an ambush.

“Across [a nearby river] we could see RPGs and small-arms fire coming at us,” Dockery said. “But when I looked over to the right, I could see that RPGs were hitting our side of the vehicle.”

Dockery determined that another enemy fire team was hidden much closer, and that a quick decision had to be made.

“I realized the enemy was actually 20 meters from our position,” he said. “If we didn’t assault the hill they were attacking from, they would have taken us out. They couldn’t miss with their weapons they were so close.”

Dockery said his first move was to investigate the lead vehicle’s driver, Pfc. Amador Magana, who could have been seriously injured or killed by the IED blast.

“I could see RPGs and rounds impacting all over the vehicle, and the front windshield was about to cave in from all the (AK-47) bullets,” Dockery said.

Sneaking around from the other side and climbing up the back tire, he knocked on the window and saw that Magana was barely conscious, but not wounded. Magana managed to give a thumbs-up, he said, and soon stood up, manned his M-249 machine gun and returned fire on the enemy.

Dockery said he then made his decision to storm the hill.

The sergeant began making his way up the hill with one of his Soldiers, Spc. Corey Taylor, as their team members provided support from the convoy.

During the charge Dockery was injured, but he kept going, through hand grenade exchanges and incoming RPGs.

“The shrapnel didn’t really hurt initially. We also had to dig shrapnel out of Taylor’s leg later,” he said.

The pair low-crawled the rest of the way up, watching bullets kick up rocks and dirt all around them, then pushed the enemy back from their position and found the IED command detonator and wire.

Indirect fire, air strikes and other close air support was called in later to deal with about 30 fleeing fighters, but Dockery's assault kept everyone else from the patrol alive.

"Hopefully anybody would have done the same thing I did that day," Dockery said, downplaying his role in the event.

Cromie, who was awarded a Silver Star July 12, 2008 for his own actions in Afghanistan that day, sees it differently. He said Dockery was nothing less than a hero.

Before the mission, Cromie had put Dockery in charge of his own squad and made him a patrol leader for the eight months the unit performed route clearance operations.

"I had an insurmountable amount of trust in him," Cromie said. "He was the most combat proven NCO in the platoon."

A brand new officer at the time, Cromie said having such a competent NCO was amazing, and that he will measure every one he works with up to Dockery.

"He's the best at what he does," the captain said.

Dockery has lived in Bamberg for eight years with his wife Dominika and son and daughter, Lincoln, 4, and Pria, 2. He said plans to stay there the rest of his life.



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