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2009: THE YEAR OF THE NCO

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Despite valor award, command sergeant major sees herself as Soldier, leader rather than hero

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18th Military Police Brigade Public Affairs Office

MANNHEIM, Germany -- In a year the Army has dedicated to its noncommissioned officers, there will invariably be those who stand out for embodying what it truly means to be a leader of Soldiers. For the 18th Military Police Brigade here that spotlight has fallen on its top enlisted Soldier, brigade Command Sgt. Maj. Brenda K. Curfman.



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18th Military Police Brigade Command Sgt. Maj. Brenda K. Curfman earned an Army Commendation Medal with "V" device for valor for her actions when her convoy came under attack in Iraq in December 2007. At the time she was the command sergeant major for the 95th Military Police Battalion.

On December 17, 2007, Curfman was placed into a situation that tested her abilities and proved her character as a Soldier and an NCO.

Nearly 16 months have passed since the incident that earned Curfman an Army Commendation Medal with "V" device for valor, but she says she remembers the events and emotions of that day as vividly as the moment they happened.

It was a day that began much like any other day for Curfman, who was serving as command sergeant major for the 95th Military Police Battalion at the time.

"One of my responsibilities and duties as the command sergeant major is that I like to travel out to the stations and see my Soldiers," Curfman said.

She was traveling by road to visit Iraqi Police stations to check on her Soldiers as they worked their mission of transitioning the stations to the IP.

As usual, Curfman said, she had planned to visit several stations that day. Intelligence on the routes,

planned by the security squad leader, had been acquired. The convoy of up-armored Humvees was ready to move out.

“On this particular day we had already been at one station, and we were headed to another area to go to the second station. We were en route to an IP station, headed down one of the routes, and I was the second vehicle in a four-vehicle convoy. About 15 minutes after leaving the previous station, we were hit with multiple EFPs (explosively formed projectiles). It basically blew out the whole right back side of my lead truck,” she said.

Curfman watched as the lead vehicle slowed down and veered off to the left side of the highway before it came to a stop. Curfman said she knew something was horribly wrong in the vehicle.

As Curfman began to go over the details of what happened next, she said what drove her into action was the overwhelming feeling that “I wanted to get out and get to these Soldiers,” which is precisely what she did.

“Sergeant major, please stay in the truck,” was the last thing Curfman heard before she threw her radio on the seat and exited the truck with her rifle. Even as the Soldiers implored her to stay in the vehicle, Curfman knew that they wouldn’t expect her to stay put.

“They know my personality,” Curfman said.

Running up to the vehicle, Curfman saw the passenger door swing open as one of her Soldiers stumbled out. He was injured, but walking and talking. When she got to the inside of the Humvee, the situation inside was much worse. The driver’s arm had been severely injured, and the gunner had an injury to his leg that required immediate medical evacuation.

The right side door had been blown up in the explosion, and Curfman had to maneuver herself to try and render aid to her gunner while holding the door closed to keep the vehicle secure in the ensuing melee.

The truck was on fire and inoperable as a result of the blast. It had to be attached to the lead vehicle to be towed to a nearby forward operating base where they could medevac the wounded gunner.

Curfman stayed inside the vehicle to apply pressure to her Soldier’s wounded leg as the convoy raced down the highway.

“I think the only thing I was thinking was that I just couldn’t let this kid die ... I knew the injuries were bad ... I never thought about any danger that I was in. I just knew ultimately that I had to get this guy to a hospital,” she said.

The situation inside the Humvee was rapidly getting worse, and inside the vehicle things were about to reach critical levels.

“The truck, because of the EFP, was already on fire. But, it became engulfed in flames while we were in it — and it was full of ammunition,” Curfman said. “I was attempting to grab anything ... that was on fire and throw it out of the truck and, at the same time, beat out any fire that I could ... and ammunition starting actually ‘cooking off’ inside the truck.”

“We knew that we had to stop that convoy and get out of that truck and get that wounded Soldier out of that truck, or none of us were going to make it. Literally, there was ammunition just popping off all over. We had grenades in there,” Curfman said.

But with radio communication cut off by the explosion and no way for the lead truck to see her because of the way they were being towed, Curfman had to come up with a way to get the convoy to stop.

“I decided to climb out on the door frame. We were getting smoke inhalation, and I decided to climb out onto the frame of the door and get the attention of the truck behind me to tell him that our truck was on fire and that we needed to stop the convoy. That was a daunting task in itself. I’m in full body armor, I’m holding onto this kid’s leg, this door, and I’m climbing out on this door frame,” Curfman said.

But her plan worked, and she was able to get the attention of the vehicle behind her and stop the convoy. But it meant another stop in a combat area while trying to move the wounded Soldiers.

But the personal security squad that Curfman had hand-picked proved to be more than capable of fulfilling their duties, she said.

“You don’t know how you’re going to react until you’re in those situations, and my squad that day -- they performed absolutely perfect, every single one of them. The gunners stayed in their sectors, the sergeants took charge -- while I’m running all over the place,” she said.

Curfman said she told her troops, “It’s very important when we’re out here travelling that I allow the squad leaders and team leaders to do their job, because I have other things that I’m concerned about. But make no mistake about it. When an incident happens I am a sergeant in this convoy. I am a noncommissioned officer here -- and oh, by the way, the senior one. I’m going to be involved, and I am going to take charge, just because that’s who I am.”

With assistance from another squad that had shown up to provide support, Curfman and her squad were able to move the wounded Soldiers, get the convoy back to the FOB and get medical attention to the wounded Soldiers.

While the wounded gunner lost his leg, Curfman says she is proud her squad was able to bring everyone home alive that day.

Like many who have earned medals for valor, Curfman says she does not see herself as a hero, but as a Soldier and a leader.

“I did what, honestly, every one of those Soldiers in that squad would have done,” said Curfman.



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