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2009: THE YEAR OF THE NCO

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In spite of wounds, 21st Theater Sustainment Command NCO grateful for Army service

By Angelika Lantz

21st Theater Sustainment Command Public Affairs Office

KAISERSLAUTERN, Germany -- His decorations include the Purple Heart, the Bronze Star, the Combat Action Badge. Yet Sgt. 1st Class Frank Sanders, a maintenance manager with the 21st Theater Sustainment Command's support operations division, says he is looking for something more.

"I love being a Soldier, and I really believe the U.S. Army is the greatest organization in the world. I want to stay in as long as I possibly can," Sanders said.

"The Army is serious business; it's not a game. When you take the oath, you are saying, 'I am standing between the enemy and my country,'" he added.

Twenty-one years and two wars into his profession, Sanders has experienced exactly how devastating and

grim living that oath can be. Five years ago, just two weeks shy of completing his 15-month deployment to Iraq with the 1st Armored Division Support Command, the convoy



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Sgt. 1st Class Frank Sanders uses two computers at his job as a maintenance manager with the 21st Theater Sustainment Command's support operations division on Panzer Kaserne in Kaiserslautern, Germany. Sanders has been with the 21st TSC since November 2004.

he was traveling in was attacked. Sanders, the maintenance supervisor for the DISCOM's operations section, was driving the fourth vehicle from the end in what should have been a routine logistics run from Camp Lima in Karbala to Baghdad International Airport. However, once the convoy's gun truck had passed their ambush, insurgents set off an improvised explosive device followed by a barrage of gunfire.

Sanders was shot in his left shoulder and left hand, and the explosion injured the left side of his face and his eye.

But when Sanders talks about the assault he mentions another casualty.

"Lt. Col. (Miguel) Martinez was injured, too. He went into heat stroke working on me. How do you ever thank someone for that kind of caring and consideration?" Sanders said.

Then there is the version told by Lt. Col. William McCoy, the 21st TSC's deputy command chaplain, who served in Iraq with Sanders.

"I have known him for the past eight years, and he is always the same -- steady as a rock. His leadership as an NCO is exemplified by the fact that he had volunteered to drive the unarmored Humvee, filling in for another Soldier, when the vehicle blew up on him. Yet, he never became bitter. Even in the hospital he was upbeat and positive," McCoy said.

McCoy also recalled that when he needed a chapel built, he ended up with an 800-square-foot building, almost single-handedly designed and built by Sanders. "In extremely austere conditions with no modern conveniences, Sergeant Sanders decided to take the project on himself. He worked nonstop for about three months, with only one Iraqi, the chaplain's assistant and myself to help," he said.

Sanders has endured six major surgeries and continues to go back to Walter Reed Army Medical Center in Washington, D.C., about every five months. And yet he remains grateful to the Army, and said the fact that the 21st TSC hired him after he was wounded exemplifies the Army's greatness.

"They told me, 'We want you here. We want you to be a part of our team,' even after I was injured," Sanders said. "The 21st TSC is very good about seeing that the medical needs of wounded Soldiers are met. I think they track my appointments even better than I do."

Despite the surgeries, Sanders has not regained vision in his injured eye, his retina remains precariously detached, and he admits to migraine headaches. But he said he does not consider himself disabled.

"I don't feel handicapped; not even at a disadvantage. Sure, there are things I can no longer do. I watch sports on television now, while I used to actively play sports. And I am constantly aware of what I am doing and how I am doing it -- but that's pretty much it," he said.

The Winona, Miss., native said he enjoys travel, is currently working on his bachelor's degree in business administration and has no time or patience for self-pity.

"I don't regret serving my country and suffering a little for it," he said.

"As a chaplain you look for Soldiers who lead others. Sgt. Sanders does. I've known him through difficult times to combat and back. Today, still, he has nothing but love in his heart. He inspires me," McCoy said.



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