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### MEDIC EARNS BRONZE STAR FOR VALOR FOR ACTIONS DURING AFGHANISTAN FIREFIGHT

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**KUNAR PROVINCE, Afghanistan** -- A medic attached to Chosen Company, 2nd Battalion, 503rd Infantry, was awarded a Bronze Star for valor April 1 for his actions during an insurgent assault in Afghanistan's Kunar province last year.



MAJ NICHOLAS STERNBERG

Col. Charles Preysler, 173rd Airborne Brigade Combat Team commander, pins a Bronze Star for valor on Sgt. Kyle S. Dirkintis, a medic attached to Chosen Company, 2nd Battalion, 503rd Infantry, at Forward Operating Base Fenty, Afghanistan, April 1. Dirkintis was honored for his actions during a firefight in Kunar province in August 2007.

Sgt. Kyle S. Dirkintis woke to the sound of gunfire Aug. 22, 2007 for the first time in his three months of deployment at the remote Ranch House Outpost.

Minutes after the first shot, approximately 20 Taliban insurgents breached the outpost's perimeter.

"We were pretty surprised," said Dirkintis. "We didn't know what was going on. It was the first time we had been in contact (with the enemy) out there."

Dirkintis and the rest of Chosen Company's 1st platoon put on their gear while Soldiers manning the perimeter exchanged fire with the attackers.

As Dirkintis headed toward the fight, a volley of rocket-propelled grenades and small-arms fire hit the outpost's aid station and tactical operations center. The insurgents had taken up positions at the Afghan security guards' post. The fleeing guards, employed by a privately owned Afghan security company, left half the perimeter unguarded.

"Post 4, post 3 and post 2 had all called in and said they had made contact," said Dirkintis. "At that point in time, we sustained our first casualty in the fight. Our forward observer received some shrapnel to his face."

Dirkintis treated the Soldier's shrapnel wounds while insurgent fighters approached 40 meters south of his position.

"I exchanged weapons with him (for the wounded Soldier's M-4) and ran down to the TOC to let the guys know what was going on with the casualty. Rounds were skipping by me. I was seeing rocks explode everywhere. You could hear RPG after RPG exploding. I kept thinking, 'Is this really happening?'"

After moving to the TOC to tell 1st Lt. Matthew Ferrara about the injured Soldier, the building was hit by a RPG.

"I remember the lights came down from the ceiling and it got really dusty in there," said Dirkintis.

"I can't remember if the radios had gone down or not, but the antennas had gotten blown off the roof and turned into a bunch of twisted metal."

Staff Sgt. Eric Phillips came running into the TOC and informed Ferrara and Dirkintis that post 3 was under heavy attack and a Soldier had been shot at post 2.

"I grabbed my aid bag and went outside with Phillips," said Dirkintis.

Moving toward post 2, Dirkintis and Phillips took cover behind the post's living quarters, where they were pinned down for 15 minutes by machine gun and small-arms fire. Unable to advance, the pair stayed put and returned fire. The fighting was escalating and Phillips told Dirkintis to get inside the building. But the medic couldn't stay there long.

"Rounds started coming through the building, so I went back outside and got behind some sandbags," said Dirkintis.

Soldiers manning post 2 shouted that insurgents were maneuvering around the living quarters. Phillips threw hand grenades around one corner while Dirkintis wheeled around to fire down another corner.

"As soon as I kneeled and looked around the corner I took a shot to the chest," said Dirkintis. "At first I didn't know I had been shot. My vision had gotten real blurry. It was difficult to breathe. My entire body felt really, really numb."

The force of the bullet knocked Dirkintis to the ground and punctured a lung.

“I tried to crawl to all fours and to get up, but that’s when I started coughing up blood,” said Dirkintis. “I just couldn’t get up. It hurt really bad.”

Dirkintis continued to try to get up and get back in the fight. Unable to stand, he was dragged by Phillips 30 meters to the mortar pit. While the battle raged on, Dirkintis helped Soldiers find medical supplies in his aid bag and struggled to keep conscious.

For the next hour and a half, Soldiers used hand grenades, antipersonnel mines, small arms and other weapons to repel the Taliban attackers. A-10 Warthog close air support fighters strafed a section of the base occupied by insurgent fighters. By the end of the fighting, 11 of 25 Soldiers defending Ranch House Outpost had suffered injuries. Five later died from their wounds.

Dirkintis was evacuated to Germany where he recovered and, against doctors’ advice, volunteered to return to Afghanistan.

Dirkintis now works in the pharmacy on Forward Operating Base Fenty, Nangarhar province.

The 2-503rd is part of the 173rd Airborne Brigade Combat Team, a U.S. Army Europe unit based in Vicenza, Italy.



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