



U.S. Army Garrison Schweinfurt
Public Affairs Office
CMR 457
APO AE 09033
DSN: 354-1600
CIV: 09721-96-1600
From the U.S. – 011-49-9721-961600
PRESS RELEASE



Two Black Lions earn Silver Stars for valor, gallantry

By Kimberly Gearhart

SCHWEINFURT, Germany -- Staff Sgt. Octavio Nunez will tell you that he didn't do "anything special." Spc. Jarrod Taylor will insist others deserve the recognition. The crowd gathered at the 1st Battalion, 26th Infantry memorial on Ledward Barracks Tuesday and the new Silver Star medals pinned to both Soldiers' chests tell another story.

Taylor and Nunez, both members of what is now the 2nd Battalion, 28th Infantry Regiment, were awarded the military's 3rd highest award for valor, the Silver Star, for what the award citations describe as "incredible acts of gallantry" during a complex attack on their combat patrol May 14, 2007 in the Adhamiyah neighborhood of northeast Baghdad, Iraq.

A combat patrol

The patrol started like any other, with a convoy of trucks covering ground in Adhamiyah, one of the most volatile areas in Baghdad. Nunez recalled that they had already encountered one improvised explosive device (IED), but as they'd not suffered much damage, the patrol continued mission.

"We were always receiving contact," Taylor noted.

The second IED would change, and end, lives.

Nunez, in the first truck, asked his gunner to scan the area and see if anyone was hit. The gunner reported that the second truck of the convoy was on fire.

"But I didn't think he meant on FIRE. There were flames coming out of the turret, the doors...the guys jumping out were on fire," Nunez said.

Taylor, who was in the last truck, and Nunez were among the first to react in attempts to save the wounded.

“We reacted the way we were supposed to react. We did everything we could,” Nunez said.

‘Heroic’ risk

Taylor ran to assist, and found Pfc. Andrew Catterton, who was badly burned, in shock, and without his body armor. Taylor shielded Catterton from enemy fire with his own body, moving Catterton to the safety of another truck for treatment and evacuation.

Then Taylor went back.

Staff Sgt. Juan Campos was lying close to the burning vehicle, and Taylor “heroically risked his life a second time” running through enemy fire and risking injury from munitions and explosives “cooking off” from the stricken vehicle, according to his award narrative.

Taylor was struck by shrapnel from an explosion inside the burning truck as he began to move Campos. The impact knocked him down. Taylor, rather than retreating to cover, regained his footing, placed himself between Campos and the enemy forces, and pulled Campos out of harm’s way.

Taylor suffered burns to his hands in his attempts to evacuate Campos. He refused treatment until after he saw his charge evacuated by helicopter for medical treatment. But Taylor says he’s no hero.

“The real heroes are the ones on (the 1-26 IN) memorial,” he said. One of those names belongs to Campos, who succumbed to his wounds 18 days later in a hospital in San Antonio, Texas.

‘Gallant actions’

Nunez ran toward the flaming vehicle and encountered Sgt. Terry Fleming engulfed in flame. Nunez tackled Fleming to the ground so that the flames could be extinguished. “Despite intense fire from enemy sources,” the narrative reads, Nunez was able to pull Fleming to the relative cover of a nearby vehicle.

Then he went back to aid in evacuating Pfc. Omar Avila, whose shattered legs and burns made moving him difficult.

Under attack from all sides, including the ammunition exploding inside the burning vehicle, Nunez not only pulled Avila to cover, but lifted the much heavier man into the truck.

Then Nunez went back—a third time.

The flames were too intense, and Nunez had to be pulled away by his lieutenant.

“Staff Sgt. Nunez’s gallant actions, courageous leadership, and willful risk of his own life saved the lives of two severely wounded Soldiers,” his narrative reads.

“I don’t think I did anything special. Campos would have done the same thing. Hartge would have done the same thing,” Nunez said. Spc. Nicholas Hartge was killed in the explosion that day.

Mystifying valor

“Folks are mystified about valor ... in the civilian world because they don’t really understand it. They get excited about it, but they wonder what makes two men in contact, in chaos, run back in to contact and chaos and save a friend,” said Col. Jeffrey Sinclair, 172nd Separate Infantry Brigade commander, under whose command Taylor and Nunez serve.

Sinclair and brigade Command Sgt. Maj. Steven McClafin pinned the Silver Star awards on Taylor and Nunez, officially honoring their “actions of heroism.”

“We know what this award is,” Sinclair explained, “because we know what valor looks like. We know what it looks like when someone puts the lives of their fellow Soldiers above their own.”