



Silver Star: Staff Sgt. Matthew Ritenour

Squad leader led his Soldiers to repel Taliban attack despite injuries

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HOHENFELS, Germany (May 29, 2008) - Less than nine months ago, Staff Sgt. Matthew J. Ritenour of the 1st Battalion, 4th Infantry was struggling to cope with a head injury he sustained during a firefight on a remote forward operating base in Afghanistan that left the right side of his body paralyzed.

This week Ritenour took center stage in front of his family, friends and comrades to be honored for his heroic actions the night he was shot in the head.

Ritenour's wife, Nancy, daughter, Natalie, and parents, John and Kathleen, watched proudly as the sergeant was awarded a Silver Star for valor May 27 by Brig. Gen. David Hogg, commander of the Joint Multinational Training Command.

"What a great way to start the week by having the honor of presenting the Silver Star to a great American hero," Hogg said. "It is absolutely a privilege to be here to present this."

"It was really beautiful. I didn't expect so many people," said Nancy Ritenour. "I loved it."



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Natalie Ritenour applauds along with attendees honoring her father, Staff Sgt. Matthew Ritenour of Company A, 1st Battalion, 4th Infantry, at the May 27 ceremony in Hohenfels, Germany, in which Ritenour was awarded the Silver Star for valor. Ritenour's wife, Nancy, (right) and his parents also shared in saluting the sergeant for his heroism during a firefight in Afghanistan in September 2007.

Spc. Robert Toussaint, a member of Ritenour's platoon in the 1-4th's Company A, took part in the firefight in which the sergeant was injured. "It was a great ceremony for a great guy," Toussaint said.

Ritenour was awarded the medal for his actions Sept. 4, 2007. Early that morning, Taliban fighters began barraging Forward Operating Base Baylough with rocket-propelled grenades, mortars and small-arms fire. During the firefight, Ritenour was injured, yet still treated a wounded comrade. Soon after, Ritenour was shot in the head. In spite of the injury, he continued to coordinate fire on the enemy.

Ritenour's platoon leader, 1st Lt. Alex C. Sanchez, said the sergeant's composure under fire motivated his fellow Soldiers to repel the attack and defend their base.

"(He) instilled confidence in his Soldiers," Sanchez said.

Toussaint said Ritenour truly deserves his medal, because the squad leader's ability to remain in control of a perilous situation was vital to the defense of the base.

Ritenour had a more modest appraisal of earning the medal.

"I've got to thank my guys -- my squad, my platoon. I have this Silver Star in large part because of them, because they were able to do their jobs," he said. "Thank you, guys. It really means a lot to me. Thank you."

For Ritenour and his family, the ceremony was also a kind of confirmation that the sergeant is on the road to recovery. For months, Ritenour struggled to regain feeling and then movement in his right side at Walter Reed Army Medical Center in Washington, D.C., but he said he was confident he could overcome his injuries.

"I had to fight," he said. "I never felt like I wasn't going to walk again."

He said he drew that faith from the support he got from his family throughout the ordeal.

"Family support is everything. I couldn't do anything without it," Ritenour said.

Ritenour will soon report to a Warrior Transition Unit at WRAMC. He said he is eager to move on, but that the day he proved himself a hero will never be forgotten.

"I have no regrets. No regrets at all," he said.

