

## Citation

### Official Narrative

Staff Sgt. Robert J. Miller, U.S. Army, heroically distinguished himself by exceptionally valorous conduct in the face of the enemy of the U.S. while serving as the Weapons Sergeant, Special Forces Operational Detachment Alpha 3312, Special Operations Task Force–33, Combined Joint Special Operations Task Force–Afghanistan, Forward Operating Base Naray, Kunar Province, Afghanistan, in support of Operation Enduring Freedom.

During the pre-dawn hours of Jan. 25, 2008, ODA 3312 conducted a combat reconnaissance patrol to Gowardesh, Afghanistan, to confirm or deny enemy activity and/or insurgents presence in the vicinity of Chen Khar in order to clear the valley of insurgent safe havens. This area was known to have several high- and medium-value targets massing and operating freely in the valley and three surrounding villages. The area of operations was also symbolically and strategically important because it was a Russian-era chokepoint, provided the enemy a tactical advantage due to its high ground and deep valley summits, and was a well-known insurgent stronghold.

Insurgents had prepared reinforced rocket-propelled grenade and small arms fighting positions with fortified overhead cover throughout the valley. They also amassed weapons caches comprised of RPGs, PKM medium machine guns, AK-47 assault rifles, ammunition, and food stores in the event of a protracted engagement.

The enemy's confidence and morale was at a two-year high following a series of tactical successes against Afghan National Security Forces. The experience garnered from these battles, continued refinement of sophisticated tactics, techniques and procedures (including ambushes) and the expansion of insurgent forces in the region threatened the Coalition's ability to operate freely in this key terrain. Insurgents were confident in their ability to win any battle against Coalition Forces on their own terrain.

As the combined ODA and ANA convoy neared its objective, ODA 3312 was forced to halt twice to dismount and explode insurgent-emplaced boulders along its route. Staff Sgt. Miller and other members of ODA 3312 recognized this tactic as a potential precursor to an insurgent ambush and immediately heightened security. Recognizing the historical enemy tactic used to canalize and ambush Coalition forces, the detachment dismounted an overwatch element.

Staff Sgt. Miller led the overwatch elements as the threat of imminent danger increased. The rocky, snow-packed terrain, freezing temperatures and a fierce wind chill further exacerbated the ODA's movement to the objective. The ODA's only Pashto speaker, Staff Sgt. Miller took charge of the dismounted element and assembled partnered ANA forces to ensure they could move under cover.

Once ODA 3312 arrived at the target compound, Staff Sgt. Miller led the ANA and established security around the ODA's ground mobility vehicles. After security was established, the team confirmed through the employment of an unmanned aerial vehicle that 15 to 20 insurgents were congregating and occupying prepared fighting positions in the targeted compound.

Maintaining his situational awareness, Staff Sgt. Miller immediately jumped into his vehicle's turret and engaged the enemy with its mounted MK19 40mm automatic grenade launcher.

From his vantage point in the turret of his vehicle, Staff Sgt. Miller expertly described the engagement area to the joint tactical air controller and identified insurgent positions by engaging them with his MK19.

As a result of his superior tactical skills, he positively marked the enemy while simultaneously describing the area to the JTAC. Without his expert marksmanship and accurate description of the area, the JTAC would not have been able to provide accurate grid locations for close air support.

As noted by the team's JTAC, Staff Sgt. Miller's involvement in the employment of CAS was largely responsible for the accuracy of four 30mm strafe runs and the emplacement of three precision-guided GBU38 munitions on the objective. As a result of his efforts, two A-10 Warthogs and two F-15 Strike Eagles dealt lethal effects onto numerous enemy positions and disrupted their ability to maneuver.

As Staff Sgt. Miller continued to neutralize numerous insurgent positions, his MK19 sustained a catastrophic malfunction, which eliminated it for the duration of the battle. Without hesitation, Staff Sgt. Miller quickly transitioned from the MK19 to an M240B machine gun mounted on the rear of his vehicle and continued to effectively engage the enemy.

Understanding the peril of the battle and the composition of his force, Staff Sgt. Miller moved from his firing position and began emplacing ANA soldiers in positions to provide overwatch, detect movement from the high ground, observe the rear of the patrol and provide security to the flank of the ground assault. His actions provided security for his team and enabled them to maintain their focus on enemy targets. Once ample security was established, Staff Sgt. Miller re-engaged the enemy.

During a lull in fire, Staff Sgt. Miller dismounted his GMV a second time to repair a malfunctioning Carl Gustav 84mm recoilless rifle.

Upon completion of the initial contact and CAS, the ODA commander directed a dismounted patrol to conduct battle damage assessment and a post-CAS strike assessment of the destroyed insurgent positions. Sensing the need to provide the ANA additional assistance, the ODA commander charged Staff Sgt. Miller with the responsibility to lead the partnered ANA force in an advisory role.

With the proficiency of an already-proven combat leader, Staff Sgt. Miller briefed the ANA platoon leadership on the scheme of maneuver onto the objective in their native Pashto language. Staff Sgt. Miller established rapport and instilled confidence in the ANA platoon leadership and its soldiers despite being partnered with the ANA platoon only 30 minutes prior to the mission.

Again, because of his tactical prowess, leadership and command of the Pashto language, Staff Sgt. Miller was selected as the point man for the dismounted patrol comprised of an Alpha and Bravo team from ODA 3312 and 15 ANA soldiers. He led the patrol with his M249 squad automatic weapon across the Gowardesh Bridge toward the target area.

During the movement, Staff Sgt. Miller continually reinforced proper patrolling techniques as well as repeatedly adjusted and corrected the ANA rate of speed. Realizing that the engagement area was located in the mouth of a small, extremely steep and narrow valley that created a natural choke point, Staff Sgt. Miller directed the ANA to disperse from a file into a modified wedge.

As Staff Sgt. Miller and the lead element of the patrol entered the mouth of the narrow valley, they confronted an insurgent hiding behind a large boulder. Refusing to surrender, the insurgent leaped from the boulder yelled, "Allah Akbar!" and began firing on the lead element from approximately five meters. Staff Sgt. Miller stepped forward to return fire and killed the insurgent instantly.

This contact initiated a near-ambush from a company-sized group of insurgents. The insurgent forces fired on Staff Sgt. Miller's patrol with multiple PKM machine guns, RPGs, and AK-47 assault rifles from distances of less than 25 meters.

The patrol was completely vulnerable, in the kill zone and without cover in a complex ambush with insurgent fighting positions located to the front (East), the left (North), and the right (South). It soon became evident that numerous insurgents occupied prepared, elevated and hardened fighting positions in the mountain rock with overhead cover along the North and South valley ridgeline. Insurgents on the valley floor to Staff Sgt. Miller's direct front, left, and right were fighting in defilade and possessed ample cover and concealment necessary for the employment of overwhelming fires on the totally exposed patrol.

As enemy fire erupted from the high ground, Staff Sgt. Miller called out the contact report to his team members and his detachment commander located behind him. He simultaneously engaged multiple insurgent positions from a distance of approximately 15 to 20 meters.

In the face of devastating insurgent fire, the ANA located directly behind Staff Sgt. Miller broke formation and bound away downhill and out of the kill zone, leaving Staff Sgt. Miller alone and with no support in the open terrain.

To the front of Staff Sgt. Miller's position one PKM machine gun and five AK47s were inflicting devastating hostile fire on the retreating ANA members and the remaining ODA patrol. Understanding the potential for catastrophe, Staff Sgt. Miller boldly charged the enemy and accurately engaged the entire force with his squad automatic weapon, thus eliminating the threat.

With heavy fire from insurgent forces from all sides of his position engulfing him, Staff Sgt. Miller continued to engage at least four other insurgent positions, killing or wounding at least 10 insurgents.

The darkness of the night and limited visibility made Staff Sgt. Miller's weapon, also the most casualty producing, the greatest threat to the insurgent ambush. The highlighted muzzle flash and the distinct sound from his SAW instantly marked Staff Sgt. Miller as an easily identifiable target.

Cognizant that his vulnerability increased with every burst from his SAW, Staff Sgt. Miller continued to engage the enemy courageously drawing fire away from his team and onto his position. Within seconds, Staff Sgt. Miller began receiving a majority of the insurgents' heavy volume of fire.

Realizing that his team was pinned down and unable to actively engage the enemy, Staff Sgt. Miller, with complete disregard for his own personal safety, continued to charge forward through the open area engaging multiple elevated insurgent positions and purposely drawing fire away from his trapped ODA members.

Staff Sgt. Miller's cover fire was so accurate that it not only provided the necessary cover to save his team, it also suppressed the enemy to the right flank of the patrol, to the point where they could not reposition from that direction against the ODA for the duration of the engagement.

His actions single-handedly provided the needed cover fire that allowed his fellow ODA members to maneuver to covered positions as the ANA broke formation and ran away from the kill zone.

During his final charge forward, Staff Sgt. Miller threw two hand grenades into fighting positions, destroying the positions and killing or wounding an additional four insurgents. Only when Staff

Sgt. Miller realized his fellow team members were out of immediate danger, and in positions to support him, did he attempt to move for cover.

As he directed his fire to engage enemy positions above him, an insurgent shot him through the right side of his upper torso under his right arm; the area not protected by his body armor. Staff Sgt. Miller immediately turned toward the enemy and shot and killed the insurgent who had wounded him. During this time, Staff Sgt. Miller's detachment commander also sustained gunshot wounds to his upper chest and shoulder.

The perilous situation forced the detachment commander to order the ODA to fall back to cover. Staff Sgt. Miller realized his commander was seriously wounded and that, as the point man with ODA's only SAW, he had the highest potential to inflict the most casualties on the enemy. Again, with complete disregard for his own personal safety, Staff Sgt. Miller remained alone at the front of the patrol, so his team could bound back.

Ignoring the severity of his critical wound and still completely exposed to intense, direct enemy fire, Staff Sgt. Miller continued to low crawl through the snow, incessantly fighting uphill into the valley to engage insurgent positions to the East and South in order to draw fire away from his wounded commander and identify insurgent positions to his fellow ODA members.

Without his heroic efforts, his wounded commander would not have been moved safely out of the kill zone to the casualty collection point.

Throughout the engagement, the insurgent fire around Staff Sgt. Miller was so intense that his fellow team members could not see him due to the dust, debris, and RPG and small arms fire impacting around him. During the ensuing 25-minute battle, Staff Sgt. Miller was mortally wounded by a second gunshot to his upper torso under his left arm. Despite suffering a second and fatal wound, Staff Sgt. Miller remained steadfast and continued his selfless acts of heroism. He provided essential disposition and location reports of insurgent actions and he relentlessly fired his SAW until he expended all of his ammunition and threw his final hand grenade.

At the first opportunity, members of Staff Sgt. Miller's team bound up to his position to render aid and recover him. Enemy reinforcements overwhelmed the recovery team with direct fire causing the team to seek cover. During the recovery attempt, the enemy's precision was clearly evident as team members sustained multiple hits from small arms fire to their body armor and equipment.

Approximately an hour and 45 minutes later, a quick reaction force arrived, which allowed the ODA to lead a patrol back into the valley to recover Staff Sgt. Miller. As a testament of the enemy's tenacity, the quick reaction force sent to assist with recovery operations sustained additional casualties from intense direct RPG and small arms fire. Because of the enemy's dominance of the terrain and potential for loss of additional lives, the patrol was forced to use its second CCP and two MEDVACs.

The entire battle lasted nearly seven hours.

Post-battle intelligence reports indicate that in excess of 140 insurgents participated in the ambush, more than 40 were killed and over 60 were wounded. Staff Sgt. Miller is credited with killing more than 16 and wounding over 30 insurgents. His valor under fire from a numerically superior force, complete selflessness and disregard for his own life, combined with his unmatched ability to accurately identify and engage insurgent positions, allowed his patrol to move to the safety of covered positions.

Staff Sgt. Miller chose to remain in the fight and provide vital suppressive fires to his teammates in order to save their lives, while disregarding his own mortality.

Staff Sgt. Miller's selfless acts saved the lives of his seven of his ODA members and 15 Afghan soldiers. As a result of Staff Sgt. Miller's heroic actions, the Gowardesh Insurgency was dealt a crippling blow, decimating insurgent forces involved in the battle, and shattering their morale and confidence. Staff Sgt. Miller's actions exemplify the honored tradition of military heroism and reflect distinct credit upon himself, Special Operations Task Force-33, the Combined Joint Special Operations Task Force-Afghanistan, Special Operations Command Central, and the U.S. Army.