



July 17, 2008

Afghanistan Engineer District Soldier receives Purple Heart Medal

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Colonel Thomas E. O'Donovan, presents the Purple Heart Medal to Maj. Dominic Ciaramitaro during a ceremony held 17 July at Qalaa House, the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers Afghanistan Engineer District Headquarters in Kabul, Afghanistan. Ciaramitaro received the award for injuries sustained during an Improvised Explosive Device (IED) attack on his convoy 3 July in Spin Boldak, Afghanistan.

Kabul, Afghanistan—On behalf of President George W. Bush, Col. Thomas E. O'Donovan, Afghanistan Engineer District (AED) Commander, presented the Purple Heart Medal to Maj. Dominic Ciaramitaro for injuries sustained during an Improvised Explosive Device (IED) attack on his convoy 3 July while returning from Corps of Engineers construction projects in Spin Boldak, Afghanistan. The IED attack occurred just three weeks before Ciaramitaro was scheduled to re-deploy back to the United States. During the 17 July ceremony, he also received the Combat Action Badge, Bronze Star Medal, Afghanistan Campaign Medal, and the NATO Medal for his superior performance as the Officer in Charge (OIC) of the Corps of Engineers Kandahar Area Office where he was responsible for more than \$200 Million in construction projects in the Kandahar region.

The Purple Heart Medal was established by Continental Army Commander-in-Chief George Washington, 7 August 1782, and is the oldest military decoration in the world still in use. The establishing order includes the phrase "Let it be known that he who wears the Military Order of the Purple Heart has given of his blood in the defense of this homeland and shall forever be revered by his fellow countrymen."



The Military Order of the Purple Heart is the oldest military decoration in the world still in present use. The Purple Heart is awarded in the name of the President of the United States to members of the Armed Forces who are wounded in conflict with an enemy force, or while held by an enemy force as a prisoner of war. It is also posthumously presented to the next of kin of members of the Armed Forces who are killed in conflict with an enemy force.

The morning of 3 July, Ciaramitaro left Forward Operating Base (FOB) Spin Boldak in route to Kandahar Air Field. Accompanying him in the vehicle were Corps personnel Staff Sgt. Roberto Gonzales the driver, Spec. Matthew Dishman in the

turret, and Mike Burke and Brian Gary two Corps of Engineers civilians in the back seats. For protection, their Humvee was being escorted between two Coyote Armored vehicles driven by Canadian forces from Task Force Kandahar's Reconnaissance Squadron. About ten minutes into the trip, their Humvee was struck by a massive explosion on the passenger side front of the vehicle. After skidding to a stop, Ciaramitaro pulled Dishman safely from the turret and made sure the other passengers were okay. He instructed them to stay down while the smoke cleared, and he ensured there was no small arms fire to follow. As dismounts from the Canadian Coyotes approached, Ciaramitaro exited the vehicle and conducted five and 25 meter perimeter checks establishing security. "The front right section of the Humvee was destroyed and no longer there, and there were several types of lubricants leaking onto the ground," said Ciaramitaro. According to Mike Burke, an AED civilian mechanical engineer riding in the back of the Humvee, Maj. "C" wasn't fazed for a second. "I was awed by the manner in which he, and the other convoy members, put themselves in harm's way to ensure the safety of the civilians in the convoy," said Burke. "I found his courage and professionalism while under enemy fire assuring and inspiring." According to Ciaramitaro, he never realized how bad the injuries to his left knee and thumb were, until he couldn't walk later.

During the ceremony, Ciaramitaro also received the Bronze Star Medal for his superior performance as the OIC of the AED Kandahar Area Office from 2 February to 1 August 2008. Ciaramitaro made an immediate impact on the District by exhibiting his charismatic leadership, mission focus and technical proficiency by simultaneously filling several leadership positions. In addition to serving as the Kandahar Area Office OIC, a Lt. Col. position, he also assumed responsibility of the Kandahar, Qalat, and Tirin Kowt Resident Offices. He successfully rekindled relationships between regional commands, task forces, and provincial reconstruction teams in the area, and synchronized AED construction projects with the maneuver units in the area. He had personal oversight on more than 340 kilometers of roads, 60 Afghan National Police Headquarters facilities, and three Afghan National Army projects totaling more than \$200 Million.



Major Dominic Ciaramitaro reflects on the events that took place 3 July 2008. "Establishing security is paramount, and we are building Afghan National Army and Police facilities to make that happen," he said. "Regardless of what the Taliban does, we are going forward, not backwards," said Ciaramitaro. "No one ever thinks things like this will happen to them. I am humbled to receive the recognition, but the real honor was leading this team in Kandahar," he said.

In addition to the IED attack mentioned, Ciaramitaro personally led the AED personnel in his charge during 10 Taliban rocket attacks on the Coalition base in Kandahar. He coordinated several convoy and air missions to AED project sites, ensuring the safety of AED personnel. "He also cooks a pretty mean Chicken Parmesan," said Norman Boeman, Kandahar Area Engineer.

The war in Afghanistan is intensifying, and Taliban attacks have increased about 40% from 2007, particularly in places like Kandahar near the border region of Pakistan. In late June the Taliban also detonated a car filled with explosives at the main gate of Sarposa, an Afghan prison in Kandahar, and freed nearly 1000 prisoners, 400 of which are believed to have ties to the Taliban. "It's getting increasingly harder to inspect the projects," said Ciaramitaro. "But the contractors are there working, so we need to have a presence as well." "Establishing security is paramount, and we are building Afghan National Army and Police facilities to make that happen," he said. "Regardless of what the Taliban does, we are going forward, not backwards," said Ciaramitaro. "No one ever thinks things like this will happen to them. I am humbled to receive the recognition, but the real honor was leading this team in Kandahar," he said. Major Ciaramitaro has returned to his Corps District in Jacksonville, Florida.