



Newberry, MI
**Bronze Star Medal with
 Combat Distinguished Device**

Sergeant David Kopera

Through the eyes of others, Sgt. David Kopera is a remarkable man who saved lives and took no thought for his own.

On at least three separate occasions, Sgt. Kopera and his squad were engaged by deliberate enemy ambushes in which his squad received hundreds of rounds of accurate automatic fire. Two ambushes occurred within 30 minutes.

During the barrage of rocket-propelled grenades and automatic weapons fire from the insurgents, a Fallujah woman who was an innocent bystander, was caught in the crossfire and shot in the chest, Kopera recalled.

"Realizing the risk of going after the woman under the threat of sniper fire, Sergeant Kopera chose to rescue her," wrote Griff Jenkins, who spent two weeks with the Alpha company of the 1st Battalion, 24th Marines on the Fallujah Peninsula and has firsthand knowledge of the courage and sacrifice of Kopera and his Marines.

"The fleeing enemy maintained fire on Kopera, but he successfully evacuated her (the Fallujah woman) to a Marine hospital unit," said Jenkins. The injured woman was then flown to Baghdad for medical treatment.

Tragically, Kopera was shot in the head by a sniper several weeks later on Dec. 2, 2006. He was classified as an urgent surgical casualty. However, instead of exposing his Marines to enemy fire to treat him, he ran 50 meters through the attack to link up with his first fire team leader and conduct a battle handover. He was later evacuated and survived because of his Kevlar helmet and great medical care.

Although Kopera never saw the Fallujah woman who was struck again, he said he was told she made a full recovery and returned home. He also was told that some of the local tribes distanced themselves from the insurgency and became more helpful to the Marines in the area. Kopera believes that by saving that innocent woman's life, in part, his unit was able to build trust with the local leaders and demonstrate their commitment to security in the area.

"Words cannot describe what it is like to bear witness to the incredible bravery and true grit of our troops," wrote Jenkins. "We truly have the most professional, dedicated, and intelligent military on the planet."

Excerpt from Griff Jenkins' Griff Notes, 12/22/2006 on his blog at www.griffnotes.com.

