

## 2 JBLM soldiers awarded Silver Stars for defending base in Afghanistan

Joint Base Lewis/McCord, Washington - February 13, 2014



***Chief Warrant Officer 3 Mark Colbert, left, and Sgt. 1st Class Andrew Busic, of 1st Special Forces Group, were awarded the Silver Star on Feb. 13 for their actions in fending off a complex attack on Forward Operating Base Ghazni, Afghanistan.***

When the explosion tore a hole into the east perimeter wall of Forward Operating Base Ghazni, Afghanistan, Chief Warrant Officer 3 Mark Colbert and Sgt. 1st Class Andrew Busic rushed to the scene.

There they saw 10 enemy fighters wearing suicide-bomb vests and Afghan army uniforms, and carrying rifles, grenades and grenade launchers.

The men, operators assigned to 1st Special Forces Group, led a fierce counter-attack, battling back a determined enemy and fighting through multiple grenade and suicide-bomb vest blasts, to secure the FOB.

For their actions on that day, Colbert and Busic received the Silver Star, the nation's third-highest award for valor, during a ceremony Feb. 13 at Joint Base Lewis-McChord, Wash.

"It's humbling for me," Busic said. "We don't do this to earn valorous awards. We do this because it's our job. I'm just glad I made it home."

Also honored for their actions in Afghanistan were 10 fellow special operators; three of them received multiple awards. In all, five Bronze Star Medals with V device and seven Army Commendation Medals with V device were presented during the Feb. 13 ceremony.

"All these men placed not only the mission before their own welfare but also the lives of the men to their left and their right, be they U.S. or Afghan," Brig. Gen. Darsie Rogers, commander of U.S. Army Special Forces Command, said during the ceremony. "It's no easy choice to do these things that these men have done. I would hope that every member of our regiment has the tactical knowledge and skill to close with and destroy the enemy. The hard part is to choose to act, to step out from a covered and concealed position, and take action. These men made that choice."

At almost 4 p.m. Aug. 28, the massive car bomb reverberated across FOB Ghazni, kicking off the assault from three directions as insurgents blasted the FOB with mortars, shoulder-fired rockets and hand grenades, according to Army accounts.

The Americans initially thought a rocket-propelled grenade had hit their building, Basic said.

When they saw what had happened, "it's a lot to take in, but you revert to what you know, and that's your training," he said.

More than 20 troops stormed the area, including five Special Forces soldiers from 1st Group, Polish troops and Staff Sgt. Michael H. Ollis, from the 10th Mountain Division's 1st Brigade Combat Team.

Ollis, who died shielding a Polish officer from a suicide bomber during the assault, was posthumously awarded the Silver Star. He was the sole American killed in the attack.

Colbert, who was serving on Special Operations Task Force-Southeast, and two other special operators arrived at the scene on an all-terrain vehicle and immediately came under heavy enemy fire from three insurgents, according to the narrative accompanying his award.

Colbert and his teammates quickly identified and engaged the enemy, two of them 25 meters away and a third about 100 meters away.

He and another operator then continued to move toward the gunfire, but when they turned a corner, they came upon six other insurgents. The enemy, dressed in Afghan army uniforms, was less than 20 meters away, according to the narrative.

In the ensuing gun battle the second operator was wounded, and Colbert "instantly exposed himself into the direct line of fire to pull his fellow special operator behind cover, saving his life," according to the narrative.

Colbert was shot as he pulled his fellow operator to safety, but he continued to fight as Basic and two other Special Forces soldiers arrived at the scene.

The soldiers' Toyota pickup truck came under enemy fire from two directions, but they kept moving toward Colbert's position, according to the narrative accompanying Basic's award.

The three soldiers placed their Toyota pickup truck between Colbert and the enemy and joined in the fight.

"While moving the wounded special operator further out of the line of fire, Colbert continued to engage insurgents with suppressive fire," his narrative states.

Basic, meanwhile, dismounted from the pickup and "rushed directly toward the enemy while providing covering fire and forcing the insurgent to fall back from his fellow operators," according to his narrative.

Basic then linked up with another special operator and they “aggressively counter-attacked the insurgents while exchanging small-arms fire,” according to the narrative accompanying Basic’s award. The enemy was just five meters away.

Both men had suffered shrapnel wounds, and as the enemy began to concentrate their fire on them, the soldiers returned to their original location to link up with their fellow operators.

After the wounded soldier was loaded onto a vehicle and evacuated, Colbert and Basic directed a group of soldiers who had just arrived at the scene to secure the breach in the FOB’s perimeter wall. Colbert then organized and led another group back into the fight, while Basic led another element, according to the narratives for both men.

As they moved to clear an area filled with storage containers and connexes, they came upon and engaged six enemy fighters, including one who appeared to be down but who managed to throw a grenade before detonating his suicide vest, according to the narrative for Colbert’s award.

“While continuing to engage multiple insurgents as he led his ad hoc maneuver element forward, a second insurgent detonated his suicide vest near another special operator and a U.S. soldier, mortally wounding the latter,” according to the narrative for Colbert.

Colbert “continued to lead his element toward enemy combatants, destroying them during an intense exchange of direct enemy fire, when a third insurgent attacked two special operators near him with a hand grenade and subsequently detonated his suicide vest,” the narrative states.

As the teams continued to clear the area, Basic killed an insurgent who was trying to move in behind the American troops, according to the narrative for his award.

The soldiers moved through the area until the insurgent threat was “completely eliminated,” the narrative states.

Colbert and Basic are credited with saving hundreds of lives that day.

Colbert’s actions “prevented the insurgent ground assault from penetrating the interior of the FOB,” according to the narrative. “His efforts contained the enemy to the edge of the airfield.”

Basic’s “quick thinking, outstanding situational awareness in an extremely dangerous situation, and fearless leadership were directly responsible for ensuring the safety of over 1,400 personnel on FOB Ghazni,” his narrative states.

Basic, who said he has recovered from the shrapnel wounds he suffered that day, downplayed his actions and said he was glad to share the ceremony with his fellow soldiers.

“It was awesome to be able to do this,” he said. “It was a blessing.”