



ANDY MORATAYA/U.S. AIR FORCE PHOTO

The bravery of U.S. troops in Afghanistan was recognized this past spring when two Marines were awarded the Navy Cross, one soldier the Distinguished Service Cross and one airman the Air Force Cross. VFW honors their valor with a look back at their actions.

BY JANIE BLANKENSHIP

AIR FORCE CAPT. BARRY CRAWFORD, JR.
Air Force Cross
21st Special Tactics Squadron/Maryland ANG
May 4, 2010, Laghman Province

When Crawford's team of Afghan soldiers and U.S. Special Forces troops went into a remote mountain village, they had been warned to expect about 10 to 15 insurgents. Instead, they were greeted with about 100 enemy fighters firing machine

ABOVE: Maryland Air National Guardsman Capt. Barry F. Crawford, Jr., is presented the Air Force Cross during a ceremony at the Pentagon on April 12. Serving as a Special Tactics officer, Crawford was instrumental in saving the lives of U.S. and Afghan soldiers.

guns. Two Afghan soldiers were killed and others wounded outright.

"It turned into a battle of survival," Crawford said when he received the Air Force Cross on April 12. "The enemy was completely around us. They had called in reinforcements, and they were using the terrain to their advantage."

During the 14-hour-firefight, Crawford went into open ground to radio for a helicopter to pick up the wounded. He also directed more than 33 aircraft and coordinated some 40 airstrikes while engaging the enemy with his assault rifle.

While standing out in the open to guide in an evacuation chopper, one of his radio antennas was shot off his head, just inches from his face.

His actions saved the lives of several Afghan soldiers and Special Forces troops like Staff Sgt. Grant Derrick, a senior Special Forces medic.

"The reason why a lot of us came back that day is because of Capt. Crawford—especially me," Derrick told *Military Times*. "I was pinned down with the second casualty and Barry was the reason they were able to get me and him."

Crawford is the third living recipient of the Air Force Cross since Sept. 11, 2001.



CPL. SARAH B. NOVOTNY / U.S. MARINE CORPS PHOTO

MARINE SGT. CHRISTOPHER FARIAS

Navy Cross
I Btry, 1st Bn., 11th Marine Regt.,
1st Marine Div., I Marine Expeditionary Force
Oct. 5, 2010, Helmand Province
While preparing for a night patrol in the Kajaki region of Helmand province, Farias and some 22 other Marines were attacked by Taliban forces. Two direct blasts into their compound severely wounded seven Marines.

With a broken collar bone, a concussion and shrapnel wounds to the face and neck, Farias persevered. Ignoring requests from fellow Marines for him to leave the area for treatment, Farias climbed onto a rooftop to target the enemy with his machine gun.

His gunfire allowed other Marines to reach the wounded and clear the kill zone. Among the Marines Farias saved was his best friend, Sgt. Jorge Segura.

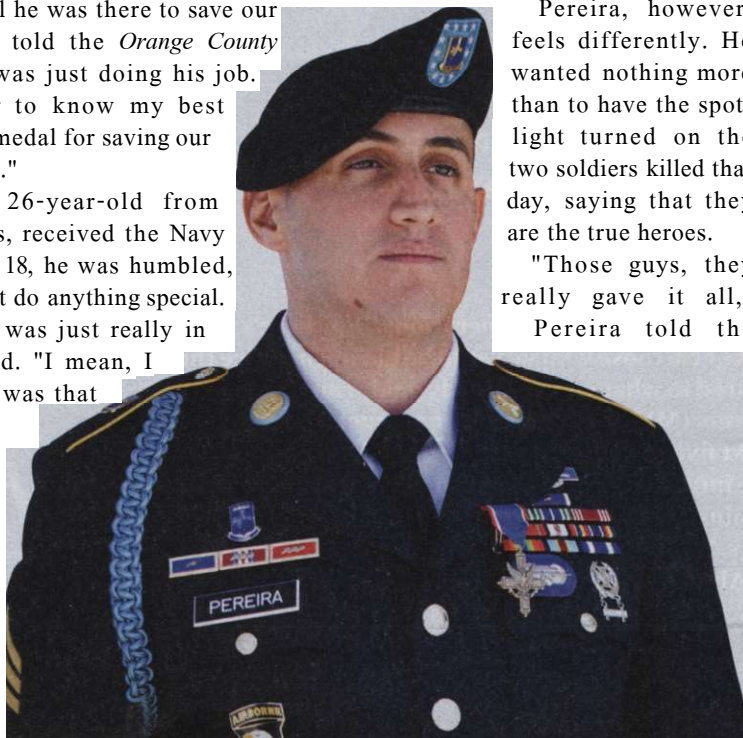
"I'm grateful he was there to save our lives," Segura told the *Orange County Register*. "He was just doing his job. It's an honor to know my best friend got the medal for saving our lives that night."

When the 26-year-old from LaPorte, Texas, received the Navy Cross on May 18, he was humbled, saying he didn't do anything special.

"I honestly was just really in shock," he said. "I mean, I didn't think it was that big of a deal."

Army Sgt. Felipe Pereira

STAFF SGT. TEDDY WADE / U.S. ARMY PHOTO



ARMY SGT. FELIPE PEREIRA
Distinguished Service Cross
A Co., 1st Bn., 502nd Inf. Regt.,
2nd BCT, 101st Abn. Div.
Nov. 1, 2010, Kandahar Province

A 28-year-old Brazilian immigrant, Pereira is the first "Screaming Eagle" to be awarded the Distinguished Service Cross since the Vietnam War.

Pereira's squad was returning to its outpost in Senjaray when it was hit by a suicide bomber on a red motorcycle. Two soldiers were killed and several others wounded. The blast threw Pereira into the air and sprayed shrapnel into his spleen, liver and left lung.

Enemy fire then erupted with rocket-propelled grenades from multiple positions targeting the U.S. troops.

Refusing medical treatment, Pereira commandeered an all-terrain vehicle and drove directly into enemy fire to evacuate the wounded to the outpost, one at a time.

It was only after all of the squad's wounded had been evacuated that Pereira agreed to treatment.

During the April 12 ceremony in which 28-year-old Pereira was awarded the Distinguished Service Cross, Army Chief of Staff Ray Odierno offered words of praise.

"We are all here because your actions distinguish you as a hero," Odierno said. "The reality is, there are people alive today because of those actions."

Pereira, however, feels differently. He wanted nothing more than to have the spotlight turned on the two soldiers killed that day, saying that they are the true heroes.

"Those guys, they really gave it all," Pereira told the

Fort Campbell Courier. "Those are truly the heroes. Just remember those guys. I think even on a happy occasion like this, I think we need to celebrate their lives and their sacrifices."



DANCE CPL. ALLAZINI / U.S. MARINE CORPS PHOTO

MARINE SGT. CLIFFORD WOOLDRIDGE

Navy Cross
3rd Bn., 7th Marine Regt., RCT 2,
1st Marine Div.,
I Marine Expeditionary Force
June 18, 2010, Helmand Province

Then a corporal, Wooldridge was a vehicle commander when his convoy was hit with heavy enemy fire. He led four Marines across open ground to take out 15 Taliban fighters—eight of whom were killed.

Alone, he provided cover so that his team could then withdraw. At that time, he heard voices from behind an adjacent wall. He charged behind the wall and came face to face with two enemy fighters, killing them both with his M-249 squad automatic weapon.

Out of ammo, Wooldridge crouched behind the wall to reload his weapon. But he never had time. The barrel of an enemy machine gun came around the wall; dropping his empty weapon, he grabbed it. He wrestled the insurgent and engaged in hand-to-hand combat, killing him after several blows to the head.

When Wooldridge, 24, was awarded the Navy Cross on May 18, his citation read, in part: "His audacious and fearless actions thwarted the enemy attack on his platoon."

During Wooldridge's award ceremony, Robert Work, undersecretary of the Navy, said: "He overcame his enemy and literally clubbed him to death. I get goose bumps every time I read this citation." O

E-MAIL jblankenship@vfw.org