



Fort Carson-MEDDAC News

Recipient wears Purple Heart for fallen comrades

By Sgt. 1st Class Jeff Troth

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It is the one award that Soldiers do not want to earn. And for one retired master sergeant who was injured five years ago in Afghanistan, his Purple Heart ceremony July 30 was a day for remembering comrades who gave their lives to save others.

On Aug. 6, 2008, Master Sgt. Travis Leland was on patrol with the Colorado National Guard's 327th Embedded Training Team when they were ambushed and he suffered blunt force trauma. Like many Soldiers, after being checked out Leland was soon back on patrol.

"We were heading out on patrol two days after I got my injuries and we were short a medic," Leland said. "Tony [a medic] didn't have to come out there; he was waiting to go home to see his daughter for the first time. But, he volunteered to come out and support us.

"He died at 7:30 a.m. and his orders to fly home came through on post at 10:30," Leland continued. "He is my brother – he is my hero."

Leland said he hears the words hero and patriot used a lot in reference to service members returning home from Iraq and Afghanistan.

"I have my own measurement of hero," the retired master sergeant said. "And, I can't measure up to my heroes that were killed in battle."

He went on to talk about another battle he was involved in that August in Afghanistan, one where he and his Soldiers had been in a 10-hour fire fight, surrounded and running out of ammo. When they were down to just pistols Leland said he didn't think any of them would make it out alive, until another group of Soldiers showed up.

"A buddy of mine got a team together and breached through the enemy line and we were able to fight our way out."

As they were making their break for freedom, Leland's buddy was shot and killed.



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“He saved 16 American lives and I don’t know how many Afghans,” Leland said. “That’s my hero and I will never equal him.”

“When Travis served with that embedded training team he went through and saw things most people will never experience,” said Maj. Gen. H. Michael Edwards, the Adjutant General of the Colorado National Guard. “It is absolutely necessary to recognize our Soldiers for what they go through in the heat of war and today is long overdue.”

For Leland, the day, the ceremony and the award could have been postponed indefinitely and he wouldn’t have cared. He said he had a hard time accepting the fact he was getting the Purple Heart.

“They [his buddy’s that gave their lives in Afghanistan] are entitled to the same medal that I am,” he said. “And it is something that bothers me, eats at me.”

His worry about receiving the Purple Heart was alleviated by a fellow brother in arms who has earned three Purple Hearts.

“He asked me, ‘do you miss your fallen brothers?’ That question tore me up,” Leland admits. “He said to me that *they* are what wearing the Purple Heart is all about. You wear it for them, because they can’t.”



Master Sgt. (Retired) Travis Leland shakes hands with Maj. Gen. H. Michael Edwards, THE Adjutant General of the Colorado National Guard, after the general pinned the Purple Heart on him during a ceremony at the Warrior Transition Battalion July 30. Leland, who retired last year, was injured during a 2008 deployment to Afghanistan. (Photo by Sgt. 1st Class Jeff Troth)



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During his Purple Heart ceremony, Master Sgt. (Retired) Travis Leland talks about what the medal means to him, and who he is wearing it for. Leland, who retired last year, was injured during a 2008 deployment to Afghanistan. (Photo by Sgt. 1st Class Jeff Troth)