

# Southwest Airborne Veteran

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## The Afghan Rescue Mission Behind Medal of Honor

By BING WEST The Wall Street Journal SEPTEMBER 15, 2011

President Obama award the Medal of Honor to Marine Cpl. Dakota Meyer. In attendance were a handful of soldiers and Marines who, one day in September 2009, were abandoned by their chain of command and relied on their own initiative to dislodge a fierce enemy. Their battle has entered military folklore and resulted not only in today's Medal of Honor but in two Navy Crosses, two investigations for dereliction of duty, three letters of severe reprimand, and a recommendation for a second Medal of Honor.

The setting was the remote Afghan village of Ganjigal, on the Pakistan border, where elders had requested aid in repairing a mosque. Hoping to win hearts and minds, a U.S. trained Afghan battalion agreed to help. At dawn, about 100 Afghan soldiers and a dozen U.S. Marine advisers entered the valley where Ganjigal is found, picking their way up a narrow, rocky wash toward the stone houses dug into the far end.

It was a setup. Hidden inside the houses and along the wash were 60 jihadists from Pakistan. The ambushers opened fire with machine guns, mortars and rockets. Immediately the foot patrol was pinned down and taking casualties.

Back at the valley's entrance, 21-year-old Cpl. Meyer listened to radio calls for artillery fire that were refused by officers at higher headquarters due to concern for endangering villagers. Cpl. Meyer hopped into the gun turret of a Humvee and persuaded a fellow adviser, Sgt. Juan Rodriguez-Chavez, to drive him straight into the battle.

When the Humvee lurched into the wash, Cpl. Meyer saw the bodies of roughly a dozen Afghan soldiers strewn across the terrain, some dead and others crying. With bullets striking his truck, he leaped out, stuffed five wounded Afghans inside, and then hopped back up behind the machine gun and hammered away as the pulverized vehicle crawled out of the wash. (continued page 2)



Leaving the wounded in the rear, Cpl. Meyer and Sgt. Rodriguez-Chavez swapped Humvees. This time the enemy was waiting in a dry streambed. Rocket-propelled grenades and machine-gun bullets followed Cpl. Meyer as he repeatedly left his armored turret to load the truck with wounded Afghan soldiers. At one point, he shot a tall man with a black beard. When another leapt forward under the barrel of his machine gun, Cpl. Meyer grabbed his M4 rifle and shot him in the head.

"You'll have to kill me," he shouted in the rage of battle (he had expected to be killed, he told me a few days later at his outpost in Afghanistan), "because that's the only way you'll stop me."

When Cpl. Meyer and Sgt. Rodriguez-Chavez again dropped off the wounded in the rear, they bumped into a backup American platoon in armored vehicles. The platoon refused to join them, so they went back in for a third time with no backup, driving into a torrent of automatic-weapons fire so a group of trapped American advisers could escape. Cpl. Meyer watched women and children darting among the houses, carrying ammunition to the jihadists.

Cpl. Meyer, a qualified sniper, was hit in the right elbow but continued to shoot left-handed until the feeling returned to his right hand. Over the radio, he listened to Capt. Will Swenson, an Army adviser who remained in the valley to fight, calling repeatedly for artillery fire, only to be rebuffed by headquarters.

Pulling back out, Cpl. Meyer took count. Four advisers were still missing. So he gathered those still willing to risk death. In addition to Sgt. Rodriguez-Chavez and Capt. Swenson, an Afghan interpreter and Lt. Ademola Fabayo, another adviser, climbed into the truck with Cpl. Meyer. An Army pilot in a tiny Kiowa helicopter, flying 10 feet above the ground, protected the Humvee from the rear. They drove back into the cauldron a fourth time. After seven hours of fighting, Cpl. Meyer found his four missing comrades, dead. At about the same time, the jihadists had collected their casualties and were trekking back into Pakistan.

Over the following months, two investigations resulted in three letters of reprimand for the unit commanders' failure to provide fire support. Bitterness about the battle and its aftermath lingered among the families of the five dead Americans. While Lt. Fabayo and Sgt. Rodriguez-Chavez received the Navy Cross from the Marine Corps, Capt. Swenson quietly resigned from the Army with no recognition for his valor.

Cpl. Meyer protested against that oversight. Last month, Gen. John R. Allen, the new commander in Afghanistan, re-opened the record of that tumultuous day in Ganjigal. Given the four-star general's personal interest, sworn statements attesting to Capt. Swenson's valor were quickly found. Gen. Allen has since forwarded a Medal of Honor

recommendation, saying it was the right thing to do despite a lapse of two years.

As for Dakota Meyer, his Medal of Honor citation speaks for itself. Ignoring withering fire, he had carried 12 wounded Afghans to safety and covered the withdrawal of 24 other Americans and Afghans. He had killed at least eight enemy fighters. He would not be refused in battle.

Men do not suddenly acquire unshakable determination to face almost certain death. At the age of four, young Dakota wanted to drive the old tractor on the family farm in Kentucky. His father told him he had to be old enough to turn the hand crank. An hour later, the tractor roared to life—Dakota had repeatedly jumped from the tractor hood onto the crank until it turned over. When he was five, he solemnly assured his grandmother that he would guard her against robbers. A rugged athlete in high school, he also tutored autistic students. He volunteered for Afghanistan as his second combat tour and risked death to rescue Afghans as well as Americans.

Cpl. Meyer set the example, but he could not have succeeded alone. Others of like mind joined him. Their shared tenacity wasn't rooted solely in fighting for their fellow squad members. In fact, the core group at the end of the fight didn't know each other that well. Capt. Swenson had only a passing acquaintance with Cpl. Meyer, while Lt. Fabayo and Sgt. Rodriguez-Chavez lived at a different base.

Today's ceremony is a source of pride for all Americans, because Ganjigal wasn't about one warrior. Inside that village on the Pakistan border, the defining values of America—individual initiative, comradeship, valor and determination to prevail despite any odds—were on display.



In this undated photo released by the U.S. Marines, Sgt. Dakota Meyer poses for a photo while deployed in support of Operation Enduring Freedom in Ganjigal Village, Kunar province, Afghanistan. The White House announced the 23-year-old Marine scout sniper from Columbia, Ky., who has since left the Marine Corps, will become the first living Marine to be awarded the Medal of Honor in decades for his action in Afghanistan. (AP Photo - U.S. Marines)

# Army Captain from Seattle may receive Medal of Honor

by KING 5 News Posted on September 16, 2011

A retired Army Captain from Seattle has been nominated



to receive the Medal of Honor for his part in the rescue of ambushed U.S. and Afghan troops, The Wall Street Journal reports.

Capt. William Swenson was part of the same 2009 mission that resulted in the Medal of Honor for Marine Cpl. Dakota Meyer. Meyer and Swenson defied orders from their commanders, who thought a rescue would be too dangerous, and barreled into the firefight.

Swenson was at the White House ceremony when Meyer received his Medal of Honor Thursday. Swenson retired from service in February.

Wall Street Journal reports Swenson was nominated by Marine Gen. John Allen, the senior military commander in Afghanistan.

An Army spokesperson would not confirm the report, saying it's not Army policy to comment on award nominations until an appropriate announcement is made, according to Military.com.

The Army Times reports Swenson had criticized the rules of engagement in Afghanistan, the leadership of officers who didn't send help and the second guessing he received when he requested fire support.

In July, former Joint Base Lewis-McChord Sgt. Leroy Petry was awarded the Medal of Honor. He lost his hand while protecting his troops during a raid on an insurgent compound in Afghanistan in 2008.

## Navy Cross winners recall ambush: 'The world became fire'

June 10, 2011|By Larry Shaughnessy, CNN Pentagon

Staff Sgt. Juan Rodriguez-Chavez, left, and Capt. Ademola Fabayo, awarded the Navy Cross, are now trainers.

Capt. Ademola Fabayo and Staff Sgt. Juan Rodriguez-Chavez are both immigrants to the United States, both Marines and, most important of all, both heroes of a rare order.

On Friday, June 10, 2011 Secretary of the Navy Ray Mabus presented both men with the Navy Cross during a ceremony at the National Museum of the Marine Corps. The Navy Cross is the second-highest award for valor in the Navy, surpassed only by the Medal of Honor.

They were on a mission with two platoons of Afghan troops and some other U.S. Marine and Army trainers to meet village elders in Ganjgal, Afghanistan, on September 8, 2009. They knew the village was in a dangerous valley.

"The valley, which is located very close to the Pakistani border, is a known approach route for insurgents," Mabus said at Friday's awards ceremony.

Their fears were realized when some 50 Taliban fighters attacked their column.

"As that column approached the village, just before sunrise, every light in the village went off. And minutes later the world became fire," Mabus said. "From three sides of the column, over a distance of two-thirds of a mile on either side, rocket-propelled grenades and small-arms fire began to rain down."

Fabayo, a lieutenant at the time and commander of the mission, was on foot when the attack started. He and the troops he was with fired back, but they were trapped for about two hours. When he called for close-air support, he was told that the fighting was too close to the village and civilians would be at risk. So Fabayo organized a team of Afghani soldiers to attempt to break out of the ambush and head back to the rear and relative safety. He got them to cover, treated their wounds. But four of his Marines were missing.

Rodriguez-Chavez, driving an armored Humvee as part the column's security element, called Fabayo and begged to drive up and help, Fabayo said no. He wanted no more Marines in the kill zone

Eventually, Rodriguez-Chavez did drive into the ambush three times, evacuating two dozen Afghani troops and Marines.

"As the only vehicle moving anywhere, particularly into the fight, their humvee became the most obvious target on the battlefield and it was hit again and again. But with no other way to get to their friends available, they kept going, returning fire entire time," Mabus said.

## Juan J. Rodriguez-Chavez



Navy Cross



## Ademola D. Fabayo



Navy Cross



The President of the United States of America takes pleasure in presenting the Navy Cross to Staff Sergeant Juan J. Rodriguez-Chavez, United States Marine Corps, for extraordinary heroism in action against the enemy as a member of Marine Embedded Training Team 2-8, Regional Corps Advisory Command 3-7, in Kunar Province, Afghanistan, on 8 September 2009 in support of Operation ENDURING FREEDOM. Assigned to the security element while other members of his team led two platoons of Afghan National Security Forces into Ganjgal Village for a pre-dawn meeting with village elders. Staff Sergeant Rodriguez-Chavez heard over the radio that the dismounted patrol was ambushed by roughly fifty enemy fighters in fortified positions. With four members of his team in immediate danger of being surrounded, he drove a gun-truck, with one other Marine as his gunner, forward into the kill zone of a well prepared ambush. With only the machine gun fires of his gunner to suppress the enemy, he ignored heavy enemy fires and drove the vehicle into the kill zone three times to cover the withdrawal of the combined force and evacuate two dozen members of the Afghan National Security Forces. With complete disregard for his own personal safety, he made a fourth trip into the deepest point of the kill zone in another gun-truck with three other U.S. personnel to recover the bodies of the fallen team members. He positioned his vehicle to shield the U.S. members from the intense enemy fire as they dismounted to recover their bodies. By his decisive actions, bold initiative, and selfless dedication to duty, Staff Sergeant Rodriguez-Chavez reflected great credit upon himself and the Marine Corps and upheld the highest traditions of the United States Naval Service.

**Action Date:** September 8, 2009

**Service:** Marine Corps

**Rank:** Staff Sergeant

The President of the United States of America takes pleasure in presenting the Navy Cross to First Lieutenant Ademola D. Fabayo, United States Marine Corps, for extraordinary heroism in action against the enemy as a member of Marine Embedded Training Team 2-8, Regional Corps Advisory Command 3-7, in Kunar Province, Afghanistan, on 8 September 2009 in support of Operation ENDURING FREEDOM. First Lieutenant Fabayo and other members of his team led two platoons of Afghan National Security Forces into Ganjgal Village for a pre-dawn meeting with village elders when the dismounted patrol was ambushed by roughly 50 enemy fighters in fortified positions. With four fellow team members cut off, he pushed forward on foot into the kill zone in an attempt to regain contact, effectively engaging the enemy at close range with his M-4 rifle. When a U.S. Army Advisor was severely wounded, he moved from a covered position under heavy fire to assist in his recovery, helping carry him across several hundred meters of fire-swept ground. He drove back into the kill zone with another U.S. Army Advisor in an unarmored truck, despite enemy rounds impacting the vehicle, in an attempt to reach the separated team members. After treating and evacuating several wounded Afghan Forces, he took the gunner's position on a gun-truck with three other U.S. personnel as they again drove into the kill zone to recover the bodies of the four fallen team members, providing effective suppressive fires with the vehicle mounted machine guns. By his decisive actions, bold initiative, and complete dedication to duty, First Lieutenant Fabayo reflected great credit upon himself and the Marine Corps and upheld the highest traditions of the United States Naval Service.

**Action Date:** September 8, 2009

**Service:** Marine Corps

**Rank:** First Lieutenant

# Eying Afghan Exit, Military Resets Priorities



October 07, 2011 Associated Press | by Robert Burns

WASHINGTON -- The American military reinvented itself to fight insurgencies during the decade of combat that began with an onslaught against the Taliban 10 years ago Friday.

Having focused so narrowly -- and spent so heavily -- on fighting insurgents and terrorists rather than traditional armies, navies and air forces, U.S. military leaders are eager to turn to a wider range of threats, including potential conflict with China. They will have less money at hand, but they do possess a battle-seasoned force dominated by troops who have never served in peacetime and commanders who learned the hard way that the next battle never looks the same as the last one.

In both Iraq and Afghanistan, the military has operated virtually unchallenged in the air. Nor has it faced large-scale missile attacks or cyberthreats. Instead it was challenged by improvised roadside bombs, kidnappings and propaganda assaults. Looking ahead, strategists see a different set of threats, particularly from a Chinese military that is modernizing air and naval forces and posing a potential menace to U.S. dominance in space.

As an illustration of how long the military has been continuously at war, the F-14 Tomcat fighters that helped launch the American-led invasion four weeks after the Sept. 11, 2001, terrorist attacks have been retired for the past five years. And the aircraft carrier from which they flew, the USS Enterprise, is to be retired in 2013, one year before U.S. and NATO troops are to hand the war's lead role to Afghan forces.

A pivot to the threats of the future will require reorienting the way the military trains and plans, and maybe how and what it buys.

Complicating this effort, to an extent not foreseen even six months ago, is the likelihood of big reductions in the defense budget.

It now seems certain that the military will shrink, and so, too, may the ambitions of the national defense strategy it will be expected to execute.

The war in Afghanistan, combined with even more intense years of combat in Iraq, put strains on the U.S. military that will ease only gradually. As they do, the push to cut defense spending is likely to generate super-heated competition among the four major services. The smallest, the Marine Corps, already is campaigning to recalibrate its role as a seafaring "expeditionary" force, and the Air Force and Navy are collaborating on a new doctrine, known as "Air Sea Battle," to define how they intend to operate together more effectively in the Asia-Pacific region.

The Army is eagerly awaiting a postwar respite from the rigors of repeated deployments for ground troops. But the largest service is feeling pressure to adapt. For most of the past decade, it has focused mainly on countering insurgencies in Iraq and Afghanistan. The pace was so fast that Army leaders had little time to think beyond those battles, and soldiers enjoyed little time between combat tours.

"We're a tired Army," Gen. Richard Cody, a retired former Army vice chief of staff, told a House committee on Tuesday. American ground forces -- both the Army and the Marine Corps -- are "worn thin," he said, and should be spared sharp budget cuts.

Lt. Gen. Mark Hertling, the Army's top commander in Europe, put it this way: "We are an Army whose systems need to be polished. They've rusted." By that he meant, for example, that the Army needs to improve how it manages training and disciplines soldiers. While misbehavior is not widespread, he said, it has become a problem that demands fixing. Left long unattended, he said, it could become "cancerous."

The Afghanistan war has taken a toll on the Army in other, narrower, ways. Gen. David McKiernan, who made his mark as a commander in the early years of the Iraq war, was sacked as the top commander in Afghanistan in 2009 with the war going badly. Barely a year later his successor, Gen. Stanley McChrystal, who was widely seen as one of the Army's brightest stars, was forced out in a flap over comments in a magazine article.

The U.S. now has about 98,000 troops in Afghanistan. Under a plan announced by President Obama in July, 10,000 will come home by the end of this year and 23,000 more by September 2012. Gradually, they intend to hand over security duties to the Afghans, who, despite a decade of training by U.S. and NATO troops, still lack much of the capability and expertise needed to prevent a return to power by the Taliban.

For several years, during the worst period of the Iraq war, the fighting in Afghanistan seemed secondary and casualties gained relatively little attention in the U.S. But in 2009 that began to change, as reflected by the fact that two-thirds of the almost 1,700 U.S. deaths in Afghanistan have happened since then.

# General: Troops to Be Spread Thinner

Associated Press| by Lolita C. Baldor September 13, 2011



FORT BRAGG, N.C. -- As the war in Afghanistan winds down, U.S. Soldiers will be spread thinner and must be ready to perform a wider array of missions, the new Army commander in charge of training and providing troops for the wars said Monday.

Gen. David Rodriguez, who took over as head of U.S. Army Forces Command on Monday, said that as troops withdraw from Afghanistan, one brigade may have to take over where two have been working. And he said they must be trained to coordinate and use the high-tech surveillance, communications, and command and control systems that are flooding into the war zone.

"I don't think we can afford to have a bunch of tailored forces for different things," Rodriguez said in an interview with The Associated Press just before he took over his new command. "That's why we're going to have to be able to operate across the full spectrum of conflict and use the tools and apply them in the right way."

A veteran of more than 40 months in Afghanistan over the past 4 1/2 years, Rodriguez takes over Forces Command as the Army faces a difficult future. The Obama administration and a fractious Congress are wrangling over hundreds of millions of dollars in cuts to the Pentagon budget that could slash programs and force deeper reductions in the size of the armed forces.

Already the Army is set to cut nearly 50,000 Soldiers by 2016, trimming the force back to about 520,000.

U.S. Army Forces Command, newly located at Fort Bragg, is the largest Army command and is responsible for training and preparing Soldiers for battle, with de-

ployments to more than 30 nations, including Iraq and Afghanistan.

Looking into the future, Rodriguez said he needs to be able to provide the trained and ready forces that commanders at the warfront need to meet a diverse threat.

The Army of tomorrow, he said, will have to be more flexible and adapt to many situations, from conventional warfare and deadly counterinsurgency campaigns to training missions that can help an emerging nation learn to protect itself.

Any future enemy will launch a hybrid attack that could involve a host of tactics, including chemical warfare, car bombs and cyberattacks. And the Army's leaders, he said, will have to adjust and "switch between high tempo offensive operations to a defensive operation to a stability operation to a humanitarian operation."

As Rodriguez assumed his new command, just a few blocks away about 200 82nd Airborne Soldiers, weighted down with packs, were saying emotional goodbyes to their families and boarding buses to the airfield, where they would begin their flight to Afghanistan.

Speaking at Rodriguez' assumption of command ceremony, Gen. Ray Odierno, chief of staff of the Army, said that in this time of uncertainty, the U.S. must continue to field the best equipped, best trained and best led force. Odierno said he will be looking to Rodriguez and Forces Command to "move the Army forward" and lead it into the future.

Soldiers today must be trained not only on how to use their weapons and conduct operations, but they must also master an ever-expanding array of high-tech intelligence, surveillance, communications and other equipment. That will be particularly important, Rodriguez said, as forces shift to the hotly contested eastern border region of Afghanistan, where the rugged terrain and often isolated tribal communities force a greater reliance on long-range observation, a stronger link between manned and unmanned surveillance equipment and dependence on a fragile human intelligence network.

"In my first 20 years in the Army, we probably got about 20-30 new systems," Rodriguez said. "In 15 months [in Afghanistan] when I was a division commander, I got 172 new ones."

Rodriguez, who was second in command in Afghanistan, is a 1976 graduate of the U.S. Military Academy. In addition to holding commands at all levels, he also served as the senior military assistant to then-Defense Secretary Robert Gates.

# Wounded Pathfinder Proud to Continue Serving Alongside

## Comrades

Story and photo by Army Staff Sgt. Todd Pouliot, TF Falcon



Spc. Stephen Moore, a native of N.C., prepares for a medical evacuation mission at FOB Shank, July 30. Moore, a member of Pathfinder Co, TF Knighthawk, 10th CAB, 10th Mtn Div, sustained a gunshot wound, April 23, during a downed aircraft recovery mission. Due to his injuries, Moore was no longer able to go on missions with his pathfinder plt. Now he provides security on medevac missions.

LOGAR PROVINCE – “I knew I didn’t want to leave my fellow Soldiers, my teammates,” the young pathfinder said as he explained why he decided to return to Afghanistan, despite having the opportunity to recover from his gunshot wound stateside.

Since returning to his unit at FOB Shank, Spc. Stephen Moore has no regrets about his decision. Moore was on a downed aircraft recovery mission with his co., April 23, when he sustained a gunshot wound to his leg. An OH-58 Kiowa helicopter had gone down in a valley, and insurgents were beginning to surround the aircraft.

“We were moving toward the downed aircraft when I got shot,” said Moore. “Bullets were flying, but you never think – don’t want to think – about one hitting you. It’s a reality check when you get hit.” The unit’s medic applied a pressure dressing, tourniquet and intravenous fluids. Moore then had to walk more than a mile to a casualty evacuation (CASEVAC) point, while taking fire. From the CASEVAC point, he was flown to a nearby base, and the following day he was evacuated to Landstuhl, Germany.

After about a month of physical therapy, Moore was given a choice to go to the U.S. to recover, or to return to his unit to continue physical therapy at the FOB Shank medical facility. Moore said he knew he would no longer be able to go on missions with his pathfinder plt. Nonethe-

less, it was important for him to return and finish the deployment with his fellow Soldiers. Moore’s comm. officer commended his Soldier’s determination and decision to return.

“Moore had to move more than a mile down steep terrain, across a river, and he never complained,” said Capt. Joseph Lang, a Hawaii native and Pathfinder Co. cmdr. “First reports were that Moore wanted to come back even though he knew he couldn’t go on missions; it says a lot about him.”

Moore returned to FOB Shank May 13, and although he isn’t going out on missions, he’s able to spend time with his former comrades daily. He was assigned to TF Knighthawk’s medical evacuation plt., where he provides added security on certain missions, and escorts non-coalition patients.

“He’s an excellent asset; a great guy to have around,” said Capt. Julian Gilbert, a Wisc. native and MEDEVAC plt. leader with Co. C, TF Knighthawk. “He serves as an additional security asset for us. Sometimes when we must land in areas where there aren’t a lot of U.S. forces present, Spc. Moore will pull security outside the helicopter.”

Moore said he finds his new role to be very rewarding and interesting, especially since he’s able to contribute to the mission alongside his plt. “I’m glad I came back,” he said. “I consider it an honor to come back and serve my country.”

Moore received the Purple Heart Medal and Combat Action Badge, June 16.



## Official: Overseas Troop Reductions 'On the Table'

Stars and Stripes | by Kevin Baron and Chris Carroll September 14, 2011

WASHINGTON -- Reducing the number of U.S. troops and bases located overseas is "on the table" as part of spending reduction talks, the Pentagon's incoming No. 2 official told Congress on Tuesday.

During Undersecretary of Defense Ashton Carter's confirmation hearing to be the next deputy secretary of defense, Sen. Carl Levin, D-Mich., chairman of the Armed Services Committee, said Congress must look at relocating some of the more than 300,000 troops stationed overseas, not including war zones, and closing some of the nearly 700 overseas bases, installations and other DoD sites.

"Is that on the table?" Levin asked.

"On the table," Carter responded.

Levin also warned that the "massive" Pacific realignment plan that includes moving 8,000 U.S. Marines and their families from Okinawa to Guam "cannot continue," after ballooning to a projected cost of \$27 billion.

"Surely we can't do that until we have a reliable cost and schedule data," Levin said. "Now we may not be able to get that data in time for this [budget] review."

Levin and Sen. Jim Webb, D-Va. visited the region in May and returned demanding the Pentagon reconsider the entire Pacific realignment, which Sen. John McCain, R-Ariz., backed. In June, the panel's Subcommittee on Readiness and Management Support approved a measure that would bar any spending in the coming year for the Pacific realignment until the Defense Department conducts a new study to justify the costs.

The Government Accountability Office that month estimated the required Guam infrastructure buildup would cost \$24 billion. The U.S. could foot at least \$15 billion of that amount in the next five years, plus an unspecified amount of additional funds expected for Guam's missile defense.

U.S. and Japanese officials meeting in Washington in June also said that both countries remained committed to relocate Marine Corps Air Station Futenma on Okinawa, but were now looking at a date beyond the original 2014 deadline. That piece of the realignment plan has proven especially contentious in Japan, frequently surfacing in local and national political debates.

Pentagon officials are continuously saying that everything is on the table for budget cutting consideration this fall. A spokesman for the Joint Staff said on Tuesday the group has no specific efforts underway to look into re-stationing overseas troops or closing overseas bases, and Defense Secretary Leon Panetta and former Secretary Robert Gates have tended to dismiss talk of considering fewer bases and troops overseas.

## Iraq Pullout Near but US Still at War in South

Associated Press | by Rebecca Santana, September 15, 2011



COS GARRY OWEN, Iraq -- Soldiers at this base sleep with their shoes on so they don't cut their feet running under rocket fire. Elsewhere in Iraq the tanks are being packed up, but here they still serve in the hunt for insurgents. And when U.S. troops hand out soccer balls to village children, Apache helicopters circle above.

In a little more than 100 days, the U.S. military is supposed to be gone from Iraq after a war, insurgency and occupation that has stretched across nearly nine years. But in marshy southern Iraq, where Shiite militancy runs strong, the war is still being waged.

At Contingency Operating Station Garry Owen, the last American military base in the southern province of Maysan, Maj. Steven Gventer spells out their doctrine: "You don't want to be soft and chewy. You want to be hard and prickly. And we are hard and prickly at Garry Owen. ... focused on getting out and aggressively trying to target bad guys."

Garry Owen, named after the fabled U.S. Cavalry song, sits in treacherous territory next to Iran, near weapons' smuggling routes, in a province whose governor views them as "occupiers."

This territory, known most of 2011 as United States Division-South on the military maps, plays a vital role in combating the militias and protecting U.S. convoys heading south on their way home. But the challenges they face hint at the wider problems still facing Iraq and any residual American force that stays beyond the Dec. 31 departure deadline.

To Americans who battled al-Qaida's allies farther north, in Mosul or Fallujah, southern Iraq promised to be quieter.

"When I was told I was going to USD-South I said 'USD-South?' What the heck happens in USD-South?" recalled Lt. Col. Tim Brumfiel, Sr., who commands the 3rd Battalion, 8th Cavalry Regiment, based at Fort Hood, Texas.

To him it was "a small blip on the radar screen." But within days of the troops' arrival in February, the trouble

started - roadside bombs, 107 mm rockets, and a particularly lethal type of rocket-propelled mortar.

In the southern marshes that straddle the Iraq-Iran border, weapons smugglers slip past the water buffalo and reed huts to easily elude the poorly paid and under-equipped Iraqi guards and fan out across southern Iraq to supply Shiite militias.

Ties with Iran have always been close, and the governor of Maysan is a follower of anti-American cleric Muqtada al-Sadr, which made for a frosty relationship with the newly arrived battalion and left the Garry Owen base isolated and vulnerable.

Prime Minister Nouri al-Maliki is vulnerable too. He depends on Sadrists support, but is negotiating with the U.S. about keeping some American troops in Iraq beyond December - something the Sadrists fiercely oppose. Then again, Iraqi nationalists look with suspicion on perceived attempts by Iran to use allies like al-Sadr to deepen their influence, especially in the south.

So when Brumfiel's battalion arrived, it stepped into a fraught situation and a mission that quickly changed.

The Americans had come with orders to train Iraqi security forces. Instead, Brumfiel used more and more men and resources battling Shiite militias. He brought in tanks, rarely used anymore by American forces elsewhere in Iraq, because they could better spot militants and scare them off.

The battalion also stepped up its presence around the base and started patrolling deep into the marshes.

During a recent patrol, Lt. Lon McBride pointed out a 5-meter- (15-foot-) deep crater caused by a misfired rocket. Insurgents had set themselves up in a village house undeterred by an Iraqi checkpoint about 100 meters (yards) away.

In July, when fire directed at the base more than doubled and a U.S. Soldier was killed, the U.S. military mounted a training mission involving AC-130 gunships and Apache helicopters. The show of force threw the local government into a "tizzy," said Brumfiel.

Government officials claimed the U.S. was terrorizing the local population, and a delegation was sent from Baghdad to investigate. But far from siding with the local government, it replaced the Iraqi police chief. The new police chief joined an Iraqi Army general who was also new to the province. Both have been praised by American commanders for being much more aggressive in targeting Shiite militias.

## Deal near on more US military access in Australia

ANNE GEARAN From Associated Press, September 15, 2011

SAN FRANCISCO (AP) — An emerging defense agreement would let the U.S. expand its military presence in Australia as the Obama administration and its allies maneuver to counter an increasingly assertive China. It would include positioning

U.S. equipment in Australia, increasing access to bases and conducting more joint exercises and training.

The arrangement, somewhat controversial in Australia, is expected to be a centerpiece of President Barack Obama's visit to the country in November.

Australian Defense Minister Stephen Smith said the broader cooperation will mean "more ships in, ships out; more planes in, planes out; more troops in, troops out."

The U.S. and Australia expect to finalize the plan later this year, according to a senior defense official who spoke on condition of anonymity because the arrangement was not complete.

Defense Secretary Leon Panetta and Secretary of State Hillary Rodham Clinton met Thursday with Australian defense chief Stephen Smith and Foreign Minister Kevin Rudd for talks on the basing arrangement, military cooperation in the Pacific region and other issues.

Afterward, Smith said the goal of the deeper defense arrangement is to "make very clear to those who would threaten us that we are going to stick together." He did not mention China specifically, although it poses the most potent military force that could oppose the U.S. and Australia in the Pacific.

U.S. officials deny that closer U.S. cooperation with Australian and Southeast Asian nations is meant as a challenge to China, which claims dominion over vast areas of the Pacific that the U.S. considers international waters. China also has alarmed smaller Asian neighbors by reigniting old territorial disputes.

The U.S. claims a national security interest in protecting crucial international shipping lanes; China calls it meddling. Beijing rebuffed a proposal that Clinton made last week to host talks between China and Japan over one such dispute.

Afghanistan was also a major topic, given that Australia is the largest contributor of troops to the war effort outside NATO countries, as was the unrest in the Middle East.

U.S. officials said they are not looking to establish any American bases in Australia, but want increased military access and cooperation that will allow the U.S. to broaden its posture in the region.

The shared base idea is part of U.S. efforts to diversify its Asian military stance, which long has focused on northern Asia. Australian bases would place U.S. forces or assets such as ships and planes much closer to potential natural disasters or conflicts in the Southern Hemisphere.

Separately, U.S. and Australian officials have decided to include cooperation on cybersecurity as part of their defense treaty. It's the first time that the Obama administration has carved out that kind of partnership with a country outside NATO.

The agreement is partly in response to the cyberthreat emanating from the Pacific region, especially China and North Korea.

The U.S. and Australia have conducted more than a dozen joint exercises in 2010 and 2011, including the massive Talisman Sabre drill that involves 15,000 U.S. troops, U.S. officials said.

U.S. foreign military sales with Australia were more than \$3.7 billion this year, as of early July. They include the purchase of C-17 cargo aircraft, Joint Strike Fighters, as well as other combat and maritime aircraft.

## 173d Airborne Brigade Flash Coins

Set of Battalion Flash Coins of the 503rd Parachute Infantry 173rd Airborne Brigade minted for Paul Fisher. There are 100 of each, they are marketed at \$10.00 dollars each with a shipping cost of \$2.90 to \$3.50 depending on amount shipped. Paul can be contacted at:

**81 Oak Lane**

**Eatontown, NJ 07724**

**Cell: (908) 489-0366**

**Home: (732) 542-1598**



1st Battalion Coin



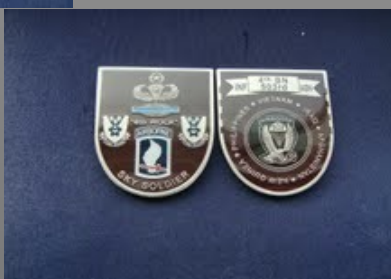
2nd Battalion Coin



3rd Battalion Coin



4th Battalion Coin



## 173d Airborne Brigade Memorial Foundation

### SPARTAN CLUB

I/We wish to share the burden of preserving our memorial and heritage as a member of the 173d Airborne Brigade Memorial Foundation Spartan Club.

Beginning in 2011, and for nine succeeding years thereafter, I pledge to donate the following amount each year to the 173d Airborne Brigade Memorial Foundation:

as a Spartan Club Commander (\$200.00 or more) \$ \_\_\_\_\_

as a Spartan Club Centurion (173.00 to \$199.00) \$ \_\_\_\_\_

as a Spartan Club Lancer (\$25.00 to \$172.00) \$ \_\_\_\_\_

Full Name Primary Telephone

Street Address City/State/Zip

Signature email address

Please mail your signed pledge form and your check (payable to the 173d Airborne Brigade Memorial Foundation) to:

173d Airborne Brigade Memorial Foundation

1160 Lake Royale

Louisburg, NC 27549

Pledges may be paid electronically by going to the 173d Airborne Brigade Memorial Foundation website at [www.173dairbornememorial.org](http://www.173dairbornememorial.org) and clicking on the tab, "Memorial Donations."

To assist you in remembering the timing of your annual pledge donation, the Foundation will send you electronically or by mail a brief reminder.



## Wreath Sponsorship Form

Sponsored wreaths are placed on the grave markers at state, national veterans cemeteries as well as local cemeteries each December. Wreaths may be purchased online at [www.WreathsAcrossAmerica.org](http://www.WreathsAcrossAmerica.org)

If you wish to make your sponsorship with a credit card please visit our website for a secure online transaction.

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Address: \_\_\_\_\_

City: \_\_\_\_\_

State: \_\_\_\_\_ Zip: \_\_\_\_\_

Phone: \_\_\_\_\_

Email: \_\_\_\_\_

**Sponsoring Group ID Number: WALGSVC1**

**Cemetery Designation: Washington State Veterans Cemetery**

(please select one cemetery per group)

**Cemetery ID Number: WAWSVC**

(located on our website under locations tab)

**\*\*WE DO NOT TAKE GRAVE SPECIFIC REQUESTS\*\***

Please make checks payable to:

**Wreaths Across America TM**

PO Box 249

Columbia Falls, ME 04623

Questions? Please call 877-385-9504

**Thank you for your Sponsorship and joining us in our mission to Remember, Honor and Teach!**

Please note that **all** sponsorships are sent directly to the location and **no** wreaths

are sent to the individuals purchasing sponsorships.

Sponsorship	Price	Quantity	Total
Individual= 1 Wreath	\$15.00		
Family= 4 Wreaths	\$60.00		
Small Business= 10 Wreaths	\$150.00		
Corporate= 100 Wreaths or more	\$15.00 each wreath		
WAA Pins (25 pins per pack)	\$10.00 / pk		
WAA Patch	\$3.00 each		
		<b>Grand Total</b>	

# War veterans receive honorable burial at Western Washington State Veterans Cemetery



**MEDICAL LAKE, Washington. The unclaimed remains of several war veterans received an honorable burial at the Washington State Veterans Cemetery. This is part of the Missing in America Project. This is 62 Veterans of indigent recoveries from Funeral Home. May we all remember a proper burial for our forgotten souls.**

