

That Others May Live: 6 Long Island PJs Awarded Bronze Stars with Valor



December 6, 2013, Westhampton Beach, New York: The 103rd Rescue Squadron hosted a ceremony to commemorate the awarding of Bronze Stars with “V” device to six Air Force Pararescuemen for an extraordinary rescue mission under fire in Kandahar Province, Afghanistan last year. The Air National Guardsmen of the 103rd, made famous by their portrayal in the book and film, *The Perfect Storm*, were recognized by Governor Andrew Cuomo in a statement he released describing the harrowing rescue, which can be read below. I have to give a special HooYah to my old pipeline buddy and former Army Ranger Anthony Yusup, still “Living by the Motto.” Awesome job, guys

Governor Cuomo Praises Six New York Air National Guardsmen Receiving the Bronze Star for Valor

Guardsmen Receive Bronze Stars for Courage Under Fire in Afghanistan
Albany, NY (December 6, 2013)

Governor Andrew M. Cuomo today announced that six New York Air National Guard members will receive the Bronze Star for Valor during a ceremony on Friday, Dec. 6 at F.S. Gabreski Air National Guard Base. The six members of the 106th Rescue Wing’s 103rd Rescue Squadron are being honored for the courage they demonstrated under fire during a Dec. 10, 2012 rescue mission in Kandahar, Afghanistan.

“Today, we recognize the tremendous bravery of six New York Air National Guardsmen who put their lives on the line to protect the safety of others,” Governor Cuomo said. “Our Guard members have served admirably both in wars abroad and during emergencies at home. The courage, clear thinking, and selfless dedication of these six Airmen is a testament to the incredible service of New York’s Air National Guard. On behalf of all New Yorkers, I offer my congratulations to these brave men for this well-deserved honor.”

The six men were assigned to the 46th Expeditionary Rescue Squadron Detachment of the 651st Air Expeditionary Group, a part of the 451st Air Expeditionary Wing, at Kandahar Air Field at the time. They are: Capt. Ronnie Maloney, of Middle Island; Senior Master Sgt. Erik Blom, of Hampton Bays; Technical Sgt. Anthony Yusup of Bloomsburg, Penn.; Staff Sgt. James Dougherty of Rocky Point; Staff Sgt. Matthew Zimmer of Westhampton; and Staff Sgt. Christopher Petersen of Commack, then a senior Airman.

These New York Air National Guard Airmen successfully treated and evacuated three American Soldiers and one Afghan soldier who had all been critically injured when an improvised explosive device hit their unit, a platoon of the 1st Battalion, 38th Infantry Regiment.

The Combat Rescue Officer and five Pararescuemen, known in the military as Guardian Angels, were dropped into a “hot” landing zone and were under Taliban fire continuously from AK-47s, machineguns and rocket propelled grenades. Meanwhile they called in helicopter gunship support, and provided emergency medical care to the four men while shielding them from gunfire with their own bodies.

“I’m extremely proud of these men,” said Lt. Col. Shawn Fitzgerald, commander of the 103rd Rescue Squadron. “Their actions validate the hard work they come in and do day-in and day-out. Being a Combat Rescue Officer and Pararescue Jumper is unique. We ask an incredible amount of both our full-time and traditional Guardsmen. This is a validation of everything they work so hard to achieve.”

Along with receiving the Bronze Star for Valor, their exploit was also honored as “The Rescue Mission of the Year” for 2012 by the Jolly Green Association, the professional association of serving and retired members of Air Force Rescue.

The Bronze Star with V device for valor is the fourth highest ranking Air Force award for heroism.

Blom and Yusup are traditional Guard Airmen who serve part-time. Blom is a Suffolk County Police Officer, while Yusup is a college student studying nursing. Maloney, Zimmer, Petersen, and Dougherty are full-time members of the 106th Rescue Wing. Petersen was honored by the United Service Organizations as National Guardsman of the Year during the organization’s annual Gala on Oct. 25.

MISSION DESCRIPTION

On Dec. 10, 2012, the six 103rd Rescue Squadron Airmen were the Guardian Angel team assigned to man two HH-60 Pavehawk rescue helicopters flown by members of the 55th Rescue Squadron, an Active Air Force unit. A platoon of about 25 Soldiers had been ambushed and four Soldiers, including one of the Americans who later died, were very badly injured.

The unit was still under Taliban fire as the two helicopters approached the scene. One of the helicopters moved into the area to put the three-man team of Yusup, Dougherty, and Petersen on the ground first.

As the helicopter moved in to off-load the three Airmen it came under machinegun fire which continued as the men moved to linkup with the American and Afghan infantrymen who were sheltering behind a mud wall. Two rocket propelled grenades hit the ground five meters away from the Air Guardsmen as they began to conduct triage on the wounded Soldiers.

Yusup, the leader of that three-man element, elected to remain in the open while exposed to enemy fire so that he could control the casualty collection point and direct timely casualty treatment.

Dougherty and Peterson ignored the enemy fire and began immediate treatment to save the lives of the injured men. When rocket propelled grenades hit nearby, they covered the wounded with their own bodies.

Meanwhile, the lead helicopter Pedro 61 landed to off-load the other three Guardsmen: Maloney, the Combat Rescue Officer; Blom, the team noncommissioned officer in charge; and Zimmer. All three men ran across open ground despite the enemy fire to help in treating and moving the casualties.

Zimmer treated three patients with gunshot and shrapnel wounds and also stabilized a gravely wounded American Soldier who was missing his legs and an arm. Blom took charge of the casualty collection and treatment process while Maloney avoided an enemy rocket propelled grenade and called in support from the HH-60 Pavehawk helicopters and a pair of Army Kiowa Warrior OH-58 helicopter gunships. He accurately directed the 50-caliber machinegun fire and rocket fire on the enemy.

When the helicopter machinegun and rocket fire suppressed the enemy, Blom passed along the plans for extraction and got the team ready to move. Blom distributed his extra ammunition to the ground troops while he and Maloney both took their places in the firing line to suppress the enemy while the other four Air Guardsmen helped the infantrymen move the wounded to the waiting HH-60 helicopter.

Zimmer noted that one of the litter teams was having trouble moving over the rough terrain and ran back to help them, risking his own life to go into the open once more.

All four wounded Soldiers were evacuated back to the combat surgical hospital at Kandahar Airfield. Unfortunately the triple amputee – Staff Sgt. Wesley R. Williams, 25, of New Carlisle, Ohio, died upon arriving there.

BACKGROUND ON NATIONAL GUARD SOLDIERS

Captain Ronnie S. Maloney, age 43, is assigned as a Team Commander in the New York Air National Guard's 103rd Rescue Squadron. He is a full-time member of the 106th Rescue Wing.

He served previously as an enlisted Soldier in the Army and an officer in the Army National Guard. While a member of the Army National Guard he deployed to Iraq in 2004.

In March of 2008, he transferred from the Army National Guard to the 103rd Rescue Squadron to become a Combat Rescue Officer. While at Pararescue School he was recognized with the Lt. Col. Don Flickinger Award for outstanding leadership.

Senior Master Sergeant Erik S. Blom, age 37, is assigned to the 103rd Rescue Squadron as a Guardian Angel Team Leader. He joined the Army in 1994 and graduated from both Airborne and Ranger school before enlisting in the United States Air Force in 2000. He has served in Iraq as well as in Afghanistan.

Staff Sergeant James J. Dougherty, age 29, is assigned to the 103rd Rescue Squadron as a Guardian Angel Element Leader. Dougherty has deployed to Iraq and Afghanistan

Staff Sgt. Christopher Petersen, age 28, is currently a Pararescue Journeyman assigned to the 103rd Rescue Squadron as a full-time Guard member. While attending Pararescue School he was honored with the Charles D. King Award for top academic performer, the Purple Heart Association Award for top medic, and the prestigious Jason D. Cunningham Award. Petersen has over 85 combat missions spanning combat deployments to Operation ENDURING FREEDOM, Kandahar Airfield, Afghanistan.

Technical Sergeant Anthony D. Yusup, age 31, is assigned to the 103rd Rescue Squadron as a Guardian Angel Recovery Team Leader. He joined the Army after graduating in 2000. While in the Army he graduated Army Basic Training, Infantry School, Airborne School, Ranger Indoctrination Program, and Ranger School.

Yusup deployed to Afghanistan in 2002 in support of Operation Enduring Freedom and Operation Iraqi Freedom in 2003 as an Airborne Ranger assigned to 2nd Ranger Battalion, 75th Ranger Regiment. He was honorably discharged from the Army in 2003 attaining the rank of Specialist.

After leaving the Army in the fall of 2003, Sergeant Yusup immediately joined the New York Air National Guard to become a pararescueman. He distinguished himself as the Honor Graduate while attending the Pararescue Indoctrination Course in 2004. He then completed the Army Special Forces Combat Diver Qualification Course, Air Force Survival School, Military Freefall School, Paramedic School, and the Pararescue Apprentice Course in 2005.

Staff Sergeant Matthew F. Zimmer, age 31, is assigned to the 103rd Rescue Squadron as a Guardian Angel Pararescue Team Member. He joined the Air Force in 2001 and previously served as a Survival, Evasion, Resistance and Escape (SERE) Specialist at Fairchild AFB from 2002 until 2007. Zimmer joined the New York Air National Guard in 2009 and graduated from the Pararescue Apprentice Course in April of 2011. He was recently recognized as the NCO of the Quarter for the 4th Quarter in the 106th Rescue Wing.