Pararescueman Awarded Silver Star and Bronze Star 5 Years After Yemen Battle

May 16, 2022

US Air Force Lt. Gen. Jim Slife, commander of Air Force Special Operations Command, presents the Silver Star Medal to Master Sgt. Cory Haggett, a special tactics operator with the 23rd Special Tactics Squadron, 24th Special Operations Wing, during a ceremony Friday, May 13, 2022, at Hurlburt Field, Florida.

Ambushed on a secret 2017 night raid, an Air Force pararescueman dragged a grievously injured teammate down a mountain and, realizing the man had suffered facial trauma severe enough to close his airway, sliced his teammate's neck open to allow him to breathe as they awaited a rescue flight.

Then, when the man was safely evacuated, the airman sprinted back up the mountain to aid three others on his team injured in the fight.

Master Sgt. Cory Haggett, a pararescueman with the 23rd Special Tactics Squadron at Hurlburt Field, was awarded a Silver Star on Friday, May 13, for saving a total of four teammates in a raid near Yemen over five years ago. He also received a Bronze Star at the ceremony, his second, for actions in the same time period.

Haggett was presented the medals at Hurlburt Field in Florida by Lt. Gen. Jim Slife, the commander of Air Force Special Operations Command.

US Air Force Lt. Gen. Jim Slife, commander of Air Force Special Operations Command (left); US Air Force Col. Jason Daniels, commander of the 24th Special Operations Wing (right); and family members pose with Master Sgt. Cory Haggett (center), a special tactics operator with the 23rd Special Tactics Squadron, 24th Special Operations Wing, following the presentation of his Silver Star May 13, 2022, at Hurlburt Field, Florida

Haggett, then a staff sergeant, was lead pararescueman on a special operations team sent on a raid "near Yemen," according to Haggett's citation, on Jan. 28, 2017.

After hiking 8 kilometers to a target, the team was ambushed. When bullets struck a teammate in the chest, Haggett dragged the man to safety, shielding him with his own body. He then led four teammates 130 meters in carrying the man down a "steep and slippery shale faced mountainside" to an evacuation point.

Awaiting an evacuation flight, Haggett treated the man's injuries, including performing an emergency cricothyrotomy at the helicopter landing zone, a procedure that is meant to establish an open airway for a patient with severe facial injuries, but that is so drastic that it is rarely used even in emergency rooms. Using a scalpel, a medic slices open the patient's windpipe, then inserts a breathing tube. Even a slight miscue can sever a vital artery.

Once the man was evacuated, Haggett ran back up the mountain under enemy fire to shield another wounded teammate with his own body and render treatment. He also bandaged a third teammate's blunt trauma wound to the face while the team moved toward the exfil site. Finally, he treated a fragmentation wound in his troop chief's arm. In all he performed emergency treatment on four teammates while under direct enemy fire.

Pararescueman Cory Haggett on deployment

Haggett graduated from Navarre High School in Florida, not far from Hurlburt Field, in 2005. He then joined the Air Force in 2006.

While the Air Force did not confirm the operation on which Haggett performed these heroic actions, the date of the cited action is the day before an infamously ill-fated special operations [raid on the village of al-Ghayil](), in the Yakla area of Yemen.

Operators from the US Naval Special Warfare Development Group, as well as special forces from the United Arab Emirates, attempted a raid on the home of Abdelrauf al-Dhahab, leader of an al Qaeda affiliate. The United States has described the operation as an intelligence gathering mission, while anonymous military and intelligence officials told NBC News that the secret aim of the raid was to capture or kill al Qaeda leader Qassim al-Rimi.