

HEROES

In the War on Terror

Each week the Defense Dept. highlights the military men and women who have gone above and beyond in the global war on terror.



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Distinguished Flying Cross recipients



Lt. Salo
Houston, Texas



Chief Stacy
Columbia, Mo.



Chief White
Leeton, Mo.



Chief Moore
Springfield, Mo.

Texas Army National Guard 1st Lt. Matthew Salo, Chief Warrant Officer 4 Robert Stacy, Chief Warrant Officer 4 William White, and Chief Warrant Officer 2 Marcus Moore

Ground forces in Iraq have the tough task of clearing, securing, and rebuilding – but U.S. airpower often provides the support necessary to achieve these goals.

Such was the case on Dec. 19, 2006, when Lt. Salo, Chief Stacy, Chief White, and Chief Moore – all pilots – performed life-saving measures for Marines and Iraqi soldiers who were establishing an observation post in Ramadi, Iraq. The ground forces were moving from building to building, searching for insurgents or other unfriendly forces. The pilots, all manning Apache helicopters, were searching for enemies from the air. As Coalition forces entered one of the buildings, the pilots heard over the radio that an IED exploded, leaving several Iraqi soldiers hurt and damaging much of the squad's communication equipment.

The Marines and soldiers quickly secured the outer area and continued to clear the rest of the building. Forty minutes later, a second IED detonated. Instead of waiting around to see what other booby traps the enemy had in store for them, the team called in an evacuation team to get the injured to a safer location. As they were doing so, another IED went off, and insurgents began firing at Marines still inside the building.

With very little communications equipment available, the ground forces had no way to let their command know the volatile situation. But the pilots in the air still had communications abilities; they became the radio relay between the ground forces and the command post several miles away.

Fire was coming from all sides, but the pilots could not fire a shot considering the urban landscape. As Salo stated, "everyone and no one [was] a target." Instead, they did what they could – drew fire away from the Coalition forces, making the enemies keep their eyes to the sky instead of the Marines and soldiers trying to evacuate the wounded and suppress the attack.

The Apaches stayed long enough for the evacuation team to get the injured loaded and headed toward safety. The pilots then flew back to camp to refuel, and inspected their aircraft. One of the helicopters had taken serious fire to the tail wheel, belly, and transmission; the other's flight systems were severely damaged. They had sustained enough damage to stay back at camp and out of the fight, but all four were determined to get back. As Salo said, "We knew the mission was vital and we had to go back in."

They headed back to the battle scene, and instantly began taking fire from the insurgents. The Marines were still unable to communicate, so the pilots again acted as the liaison between the forces on the ground and the command post. Meanwhile, they had to dodge shots and RPGs being leveled their way – still unable to fire back for fear of hitting innocent civilians.

Going back and forth twice more to refuel, the pilots each time made the decision to go back into the war zone, although their aircrafts were significantly damaged. The fight raged on for seven hours, and the pilots stayed to provide communications support and air cover. The Marines took extensive hits, and with casualties piling up, they realized they all needed to evacuate the area immediately.

With no direct communication with their command post, and no reinforcements in sight, the Marines realized they had to make a run for it on foot. With the Apaches flying overhead providing security and cover, the Coalition troops eventually made it safely back to base.

For their bravery and actions, all four pilots received the Distinguished Flying Cross for heroism and extraordinary achievement on April 16, 2007. National Guard Bureau [story](#).