

Kentucky Guard Soldier Honored

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By Mr. Tom Loftus

Timothy Nein vividly recalls what happened along a highway 26 miles southeast of Baghdad on Palm Sunday, 2005. A staff sergeant deployed to Iraq as part of the Kentucky National Guard's 617th Military Police Company, Nein was leading a squad of 10 Soldiers patrolling the key supply route when it came upon two truck convoys under fire from automatic weapons and rocket-propelled grenades.

"The guys from my squad can tell you there's not a day that goes by that that day does not affect us in one way or another, good or bad," Nein said [17 February 2007].

Despite heavy fire from a force of insurgents much larger than he initially expected, Nein led a successful counterattack. At a ceremony at the Marriott Griffin Gate Resort [Lexington, Kentucky], Nein was awarded the Distinguished Service Cross for his actions that day. The medal is the Army's second-highest decoration, behind only the Medal of Honor, and is awarded for extreme gallantry and risk of life in combat. Nein, 37, of Henryville, Indiana, is just the fifth U.S. Army Soldier to receive the Distinguished Service Cross in the War on Terror. And he is the first member of the Kentucky Guard to receive the medal since World War II.

His wife, Renea, and sons, Samuel, 11, and Ian, 6, were part of a gathering of more than 200 that fell silent as the chief of the National Guard Bureau, Lieutenant General H. Steven Blum, prepared to pin the medal. Blum said written accounts of the actions of Nein and other winners of the medal read almost like fiction.

"This is no fiction," Blum said. "Ladies and gentlemen, you're looking at a true American hero, Kentucky Army National Guard Soldier."

Afterward, Nein said that at the time he was not aware he was acting with extreme gallantry. He said he was just trying to make the right decisions under extreme circumstances.

"We do a job every day and there are a lot of guys out there doing it every day," he said. "They just don't find themselves in the situation that we did at that time."

Nein said, "I've read the stories of so many men over my life from World War II, Vietnam, and so on and so forth, and of all the things that they did. And to be put in this light with them now is quite an honor and actually pretty humbling." Nein recalled that as his squad drove up to the stopped convoys—one headed north, the other south—he suspected the attack involved a fairly small group of insurgents.

"We dismounted and began doing assaults against their different positions," he said.

"When we made the turn to flank the AIF (anti-Iraqi forces) I saw seven cars—all four doors open, and I did the math real quick in my head," he said. "That's 28 against 10. It's 2.8 to 1 odds. That's not very good. Little did I know that it was really 5 to 1 odds. Even worse."

Nein said he considered ordering the squad to destroy its equipment and withdraw. Instead, he decided to attack a trench line that many of the insurgents were using for cover.

"We had taken a couple of wounded and I knew at that point that we needed to start going into the trenches or canal systems to start trying to eliminate some of those guys," he said. "If not, I was afraid we were all going to die there."

The certificate of his award says, "Under heavy fire, Staff Sergeant Nein displayed great courage by directing an assault on an enemy trench line, firing his weapon and throwing hand grenades to suppress the enemy. His squad killed several insurgents, captured large quantities of weapons and ammunition, and saved the lives of numerous convoy members."

Nein, now on active duty as the noncommissioned officer for training with the 223d Military Police Company in Louisville, Kentucky, had previously been awarded the Silver Star for his actions.

Nein said his family was a bit overwhelmed by the ceremony.

"We're real excited about it. It's just part of being in the Army," he said. "You've got to take the good with the bad. We're taking the good this time."



Mr. Loftus writes for the Louisville, Kentucky, Courier-Journal.