



Medal of Honor for McGinnis

WASHINGTON – President Bush has announced that Spc. Ross McGinnis will posthumously be awarded the Medal of Honor in a White House ceremony Monday, two weeks shy of what would have been his 21st birthday.

McGinnis will be just the second U.S. Soldier to receive the medal for actions in Operation Iraqi Freedom and a special Web site dedicated to his heroics has been created by the Soldiers Media Center at <http://www.army.mil/medalofhonor/McGinnis>. The site includes a profile on the 1st Infantry Division Soldier, battlescape, background on the medal, video news reports and a number of other resources.

Soldier's Soldier

McGinnis arrived in Schweinfurt, Germany in November 2005 and reported to 1st Platoon, Company C, 1st Battalion, 26th Infantry Regiment with an influx of Soldiers as the company was preparing for its upcoming mission to Iraq. According to retired Staff Sgt. Ian Newland, he immediately became an instrumental part of the team.

"His personality and humor made him stand out. He was the comedian out of everybody," Newland, a squad leader with 1st Platoon at the time, said. "You could be having the worst day in the field, or the worst day in the rear "D", and Ross would come in a room and everybody would be laughing within three minutes."

Ross was known as the funny guy with an infectious smile from the day he joined the unit, Newland said. "I have this image of him, even today. We were in Germany and he was up on a .50-cal gunning. We had been doing a convoy for probably around eight hours. I was in the vehicle behind him and he turned around and smiled at my gunner. His teeth were just covered in dirt from being up on the gun, but he's just still smiling ear to ear. That right there was just him."

His gifts extended beyond platoon funny man according to his leaders, who said he was also a top-notch Soldier.

"I had four platoons, roughly 190

Soldiers in my command. There were certain Soldiers that would stand out. McGinnis was definitely one of those Soldiers," said Maj. Michael Baka, commander of Company C from June 2005 to March 2007. "He was one of the top members of his platoon. His platoon sergeant handpicked him to serve as the machine gunner on his Humvee, which speaks highly of his performance." McGinnis excelled in weaponry, marksmanship and physical training as well.

He was also a born leader, Newland said, who knew how to read and react to different Soldiers in a variety of situations. "People responded to him, and he knew how to respond to people's personalities and characters. That is one of the hardest traits to build as a leader, to be able to adapt, per Soldier. He had that naturally."

Adamiyah

The first unit from the battalion on the ground, Company C arrived in Iraq Aug. 4, 2006 following a week of training in Kuwait. Combat Outpost Apache in Adamiyah, a northeast section of Baghdad steeped in sectarian violence, was to be their home. The area had lacked a U.S. presence for eight months.

"There were a lot of kidnappings, killings and a lot of enemy activity in our sector," Baka said. Insurgent attacks, sniper fire, grenade contact and IEDs were all part of daily life in Adamiyah.

In October, just two months into the deployment, Company C had already lost two Soldiers; Staff Sgt. Garth Sizemore to a sniper's bullet and Sgt. Willsun Mock in an IED explosion. In November, after Saddam Hussein was found guilty of crimes against humanity, the battalion fought a five-hour battle against enemy insurgents who attacked the outpost.

By December, the men of 1-26 were battle-hardened, but McGinnis had a way of taking the focus off the tragedies.



Spc. Ross McGinnis will be posthumously awarded the Medal of Honor in a ceremony at the White House Monday. (Photo illustration courtesy U.S. Army)

"He was constantly motivating and positive all the time, and that really helped the platoon out a lot. He was key in our platoon because of that," Newland said. "Right after we lost Sgt. Sizemore, we were all really shocked - it really hit home. And then Sgt. Mock - we were getting pretty depressed. But Ross, he knew how to take our attention off of that - all of us - from senior leaders to your private Joe. He knew how to respond."

That fateful day

Dec. 4, 2006, 1st Platoon was gearing up to patrol the streets of Adamiyah and deliver a 250-kilowatt generator to provide increased electricity to the area. Insurgents had been lobbing grenades at vehicles on patrols, and in response the platoon had honed its reaction skills through a series of training scenarios Newland likened to fire drills. He had experienced such an incident nine days earlier on patrol, but the grenade turned out to be a dud.

As they rolled out of Apache's gates, the men in the six-vehicle patrol felt up to their mission, despite ever-present dangers, as they did each time they patrolled Adamiyah's streets, Baka said. "We had only just left the gate. We were moving

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deliberately down the streets and had just taken a left-hand turn on a main road just south of Abu Hanifah mosque.”

Baka’s was the fourth vehicle in the order of movement. The platoon sergeant’s vehicle was the last, as is typical for a standard patrol, and McGinnis manned its machine gun.

According to official statements from Sgt. Lyle Buehler (the driver), Sgt. 1st Class Cedric Thomas (platoon sergeant and truck commander), Spc. Sean Lawson (medic) and Newland, McGinnis sat in the gunner strap, .50-cal at the ready, facing backward to ensure rear security. Buehler and Thomas rode in the front of the vehicle, and Newland and Lawson in the back.

As the sixth vehicle made the left turn, Baka heard a loud explosion. His initial thought was that a grenade had exploded outside his own up-armored Humvee. Baka’s machine gunner got on the intercom and said, “Sir, it looks like our last vehicle got hit.” All four of the Humvee’s doors had been blown off. Baka ordered his vehicle and the one behind it to turn around. “Once I saw the vehicle I knew right away that we had a hand grenade that had entered the vehicle, and that we had a large number of casualties,” he said.

Baka got a new driver for the crippled but still running Humvee, and they headed back to Apache. He said he knew the Soldiers had sustained injuries, but did not know to what extent until arriving at the outpost. He didn’t know that McGinnis

was dead or that he died a hero.

Thomas pulled Baka aside within minutes of arriving at Apache and said, “Sir, McGinnis saved our lives today.” Then he told the story that would support that statement.

An insurgent on a nearby rooftop threw a grenade at McGinnis’ vehicle. He unsuccessfully attempted to deflect the grenade, and it entered the vehicle behind him. McGinnis quickly announced, “Grenade!”

According to official accounts by survivors, McGinnis stood up and was preparing to jump out of the vehicle. “That is what the machine gunner is supposed to do,” Baka said. “He’s supposed to announce the grenade, give a fair amount of time for people in the vehicle to react, and then he’s supposed to save himself. No one would have blamed him if he did that, because that is what he was trained to do.”

This time, the 19-year-old Soldier would not heed his training.

The other Soldiers asked, “Where?” McGinnis’ response: “It’s in the truck!”

McGinnis saw the grenade sitting on the radio mount behind him and realized the others weren’t aware of its location. They were combat-locked in the Humvee and would not have time to escape. As he gave his response, he pushed the gunner strap out from under him and laid his back on top of the grenade. It detonated, killing him instantly.

Buehler and Thomas received minor shrapnel injuries, and Lawson suffered a perforated eardrum and concussion. Newland received more of the blast and was severely wounded but would survive. “The driver and truck commander I am certain would have been killed if that blast had taken full effect,” Baka said.

Newland, who was medically retired because of his injuries, was able to protect himself because of McGinnis’ warning. “He put his arm over his face, which I think saved his life, because a piece of shrapnel hit him in the arm. Another hit him in the chin and some in his legs. But he’s alive today,” Baka added.

Within 24 hours of McGinnis’ sacrifice, Baka gathered statements from the survivors and wrote the recommendation for his Medal of Honor. He received the



Silver Star, the third-highest award for valor, as an interim award.

Magnitude of his sacrifice

“The first time it became full magnitude for me was when we were loading his body onto the helicopter for the hero flight - that’s standard,” Baka said. The unit held a small, informal ceremony and Baka led them in a prayer, as there was no chaplain at the combat outpost. As the helicopter flew away, they saluted the young man who laid down his life so the men he loved and served with could live.

“We have hero flights for every Soldier, and every Soldier that gives his life’s a hero. But McGinnis, in my mind, is the definition of hero,” Baka said. “From this day forward if anyone ever asks me to define the word hero, I would simply tell them the story of Spc. Ross McGinnis and the actions he took that day to save four of his brothers.”

For the men who survived, each breath they take serves as a reminder of McGinnis’ courageous sacrifice.

“By all means I should have died that day. He gave me a life that he can’t have now,” Newland said. “There isn’t a single day or hour that goes by that I don’t take in everything. The smell of my daughter’s hair, the smile my son gives me out of nowhere, the soft touch of my wife’s hand just driving in the car. Normally those are things people might take for granted. I’m

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Schweinfurt remembers the fallen



Soldiers, friends, and families of the USAG Schweinfurt paid their respects to the fallen this Memorial Day weekend. Separate battalions around Schweinfurt held individual ceremonies Thursday. From gun salutes at the 9th Engineer memorial to a tolling bell and a table full of red roses (top right) distributed by Spc. Kevin Berry at the 1st Battalion, 2nd Infantry ceremony, the tributes to the fallen were as varied as the Soldiers they honored.

The Schweinfurt Veterans of Foreign Wars (VFW) post number 10658 hosted a Memorial Day remembrance at the Dagger Brigade memorials on Conn Barracks Monday. Post Commander David Morgan noted that one goal of the ceremony was to “put the memorial back in Memorial Day.” Morgan served as the Dagger Brigade’s rear-detachment first sergeant during its most recent deployment.

“Those who have fallen, we must remember,” said guest speaker Command Sgt. Maj. Michael Bartelle, senior noncommissioned officer for Allied Command in Europe.

The VFW and Schweinfurt Community Spouses Club placed wreaths to honor the fallen, with a little help (top left, left to right) from Seyana Pedroza, Hailey Carlruhe, and Alyssa Isom.

After the ceremony, attendees were invited to pay their personal respects at the Dagger Memorials. At right, Lindsey McClaflin considers the Dagger Memorial for Operation Iraqi Freedom 06-08, a deployment from which her father, Command Sgt. Major Steven McClaflin, returned last fall. (Photos by Kimberly Gearhart)



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able to appreciate and have these things all over again, every day, every hour, because of what Ross did.”

Regular guy

Tom McGinnis is still adjusting to the fact that his son, who he described as average, often to the point of being an underachiever, is receiving the Medal of Honor.

“I never pictured what a Medal of

Honor winner is supposed to look like, but I guess I would think of somebody like a John Wayne character in the movies, where the guy is macho and tough and fear is nothing,” Tom said. “But of course, that’s not anywhere close to what my son, Ross, was like. Although he had very little fear in him, he wasn’t a tough, macho type of person. He was just like you and me.”

This story is an excerpt from an Army News Service Release. The complete release can be viewed at <http://www.army.mil/news/2008/05/23/9396-second-oif-soldier-to-receive-posthumous-medal-of-honor/index.html>.





News Briefs

Comedy with a message

Comedian Bernie McGrenahan will perform free of charge at the Ledward Theater Monday, Tuesday, and Wednesday at 10 a.m. and 2 p.m. daily. McGrenahan mixes comedy chops with a serious message about the dangers of drug and alcohol abuse. The event is open to the public.

MWR bazaar

Shop at Morale, Welfare, and Recreation's bazaar at Finney Fitness Center on Conn Barracks tomorrow through Sunday. The bazaar begins at 11 a.m. daily and is open to all U.S. ID card holders.

Run for fun

Join the D-Day Fun Run at Kessler Field May 31. Courses are available in multiple lengths-- something for everyone in the family. Walk, run, or push a stroller along 5, 10, or 20K routes. Prizes will be awarded to top finishers in all age groups. Register from 7:30 to 8:30 a.m. Run begins at 9 a.m.

Children can SOAR

Student Online Achievement Resources is an online learning platform designed specifically for DoDDS students. Parental orientation will be Friday from 6 to 8 p.m. in Bldg. 206, room 316 on Ledward Barracks. Call 354-6057 to register.

Learn German

Learn how to speak German! Sign up for Army Community Service's free beginning German language class starting June 2. Class is held Mondays, Wednesdays, and Fridays for 12 sessions at Ledward's Yellow Ribbon Room and runs from 11:30 a.m. to 1:30 p.m. For more information, call 354-6933 or 09721-96-6933.

Crafts Studio fieldtrips

Join the Ledward Crafts Studio on for Saturday's trip to a night flea market in Coburg. Trip departs the studio at 5 p.m. and returns at 10 p.m. Or come Sunday and see the flea market in Sickendorf. Trip departs at 8 a.m. and returns at 6 p.m. For more information, or to sign up, call 354-6903 or 09721-96-6903.

Challenge runs until July

The Army Family Team Building Unit Challenge will continue through July 4. By taking AFTB classes, Soldiers receive promotion points and gain knowledge and earn their battalion competition points. For more information, call at 354-6933 or 09721-96-6933 or email jennifer.litchfield@eur.army.mil.

Summer camp orientation

School Age Services will hold a Summer camp registration/orientation Wednesday at 5 p.m. This is a requirement to enroll children for the summer. Call 354-6974 or 09721-82181 for more information.

Newcomer Orientation

Are you new to the Schweinfurt community? If so, then the five-day Schweinfurt Newcomers Awareness Program beginning Monday is for you. Free childcare is available the entire week. Get acquainted with the military community as well as the German town of Schweinfurt. To sign up, call Army Community Service at 354-6933 or 09721-96-6933.

Theater production

The USAG Schweinfurt Community Theater will present "And Then They Came For Me," a production recalling one of the darkest periods of world history: World War II and the Holocaust. The production will run June 5-7 at 7 p.m. nightly. Cost is \$10 for adults and \$7 for students K-12. After the play, Holocaust Survivor Eva Schloss will speak about her experiences, some of which are dramatized during the play.

Medical records move

Beginning tomorrow, all medical records kept in the Wuerzburg Health Clinic will be relocated to the Schweinfurt Health Clinic. This records move is due to the eventual closure of Wuerzburg Leighton Barracks. All personnel will be able to receive their records during out-processing in Schweinfurt. Wuerzburg Health Clinic will continue to provide partial services, such as CMAs and printing electronic copies of records, until June 12. For more information, contact Staff Sgt. Jeffery Johnson at 350-7797 or 0931-889-7797.

Schweinfurt Dispatch



Commander Lt. Col. Anthony Haager
Command Sgt Maj. CSM Keith McMullen
Public Affairs Officer George Ohl
Command Information Officer Mark Heeter
Writer/Editors Kimberly Gearhart
Elvira Gladwell
Sandra Wilson
Lindsey Cole

The Schweinfurt Dispatch weekly newsletter is an unofficial publication of the U.S. Army Garrison Schweinfurt, IMCOM-Europe and the U.S. Army authorized under the provisions of AR 360-1.

The newsletter is published and distributed weekly in an electronic format. The newsletter can be viewed on the U.S. Army Schweinfurt website at <http://www.schweinfurt.army.mil>.

This newsletter is a command information product that places emphasis on events and activities occurring throughout the Schweinfurt and Lower Franconia areas.

Information and photos included in this

newsletter are acquired from sources that highlight events, programs and activities in Schweinfurt and Lower Franconia.

Dates, times, locations, and the events themselves might change or be cancelled without prior notice.

To be added to the Schweinfurt Dispatch distribution list, please email: mail.sft.pao@eur.army.mil.

This address can also be used to submit community slides or information on upcoming events, or you can reach the USAG Schweinfurt public affairs office by calling 354-1600/6381 or (09721) 961600/966381.



Community 6 week outlook calendar

- 3 JUNE** --Better Opportunities for Single Soldiers (BOSS) meeting, Finney Rec Center, 2 p.m., 354-8476.
--Anger Management, Ledward ACS, 4-part class every Tuesday in June, 3-5 p.m., 354-6933.
- 4 JUNE** --Parenting with Love and Logic part I, Ledward ACS, 10-11:30 a.m., call 354-6933.
--Investing for teens, Ledward Teen Center, 6 to 7 p.m. Call ACS at 354-6933.
- 5-7 JUNE** --“And Then They Came for Me”, Abrams Theater, 7 p.m., with guest speaker Eva Geringer.
- 5-9 JUNE** --Free computer classes, 8 a.m. to 12:50 p.m., call ACS for details at 354-6933.
- 6 JUNE** --Wuerzburg High School and Wuerzburg Elementary/Middle School, last day of school.
--Final day for tax preparation assistance at the Schweinfurt Tax Center on Conn Barracks.
- 7 JUNE** --MWR golf tournament, Loffelstertz Golf Course, 8:30 a.m. Call 353-8234 to register.
- 8 JUNE** --BOSS paintball tournament, Conn Paintball Field, noon. Call 353-8476 to register.
- 10 JUNE** --Community Update Forum, Schweinfurt Elementary School, 6 p.m.
- 11 JUNE** --Parenting with Love and Logic part II, Ledward ACS, 10-11:30 a.m., call 354-6933.
--Community Update Forum, Leighton Community Activities Center, 6 p.m.
- 11-12 JUNE** --BOSS Olympics: volleyball, basketball, dodgeball, softball, flag football at Kessler field, 1 p.m.
- 12 JUNE** --Schweinfurt Elementary and Schweinfurt Middle School, last day of school.
--Garrison Army Birthday celebration, Ledward Andrus Gardens, 4:30 to 5:30 p.m.
- 14 JUNE** --Super Saturday, SAS and CDC, 9:30 a.m. to 2:30 p.m., call 354-6517.
- 15 JUNE** --Father’s Day. Give your dad something special.
- 16 JUNE** --Volunteer Orientation, Yellow Ribbon Room, 10-11 a.m., call ACS 354-6933.
- 17 JUNE** --Better Opportunities for Single Soldiers (BOSS) meeting, Finney Rec Center, 2 p.m., 354-8476.
- 20 JUNE** --Daddy Basic Training, Ledward ACS, 9:30 a.m. to 12:30 p.m., 354-6933.
- 24 JUNE** --Couples Communication, Ledward ACS, 2 to 4 p.m., call 354-6933.
- 26 JUNE** --Job Search Strategies, Ledward ACS, 2 to 4 p.m. Call to sign up at 354-6933.
--Ledward library adult book club meets to discuss “Eat, pray, and love” at 5:15 p.m.
- 27 JUNE** --Smooth Move Seminar, ACS building, 9 a.m. to noon. Call 354-6933
--ADD/ADHD Support Group, ACS building, 10 a.m. to noon. Call 354-6933.
--Parents’ Night Out, SAS and CDC, 6:30-11 p.m., call CYS central registration at 354-6517.
- 30 JUNE** --Deadline for Department of the Army Arts and Crafts contest. Go to <https://artscrafts.fmwrc.army.mil> or call the Ledward Crafts Studio at 354-6903.
--Last day of service for Customs, POV inspection, and AFCU on Leighton Barracks.
- 4 JULY** --Fourth of July Celebration, Kessler Field. Live music by “Seven Dust”, fun run, salute to the flag ceremony, food, and fireworks.
- 9 JULY** --Final day of service for Leighton Vet Clinic.
- 9-10 JULY** --Dramatization about John Wesley and St. Patrick by Roger Nelson, Ledward Chapel, 7 p.m.



CAV helps Afghans retake critical bridge ...

Story and photo by Staff Sgt. Brandon Aird
173rd ABCT Public Affairs

NURISTAN PROVINCE, Afghanistan – Soldiers from 1st Squadron, 91st Cavalry Regiment (Airborne) and Legion Company, 1st Battalion, 503rd Infantry Regiment (Airborne), teamed with the Afghan National Army (ANA) and the Afghan Border Police (ABP) to conduct Operation Mountain Highway II in eastern Nuristan province, Afghanistan recently.

Operation Mountain Highway II started April 22 when Soldiers from International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) and the ANA simultaneously air-assaulted at night onto three mountains above Gowerdesh Bridge.

Afghan and American Soldiers created Observation Posts Mace, Hatchet and Brick, which enabled the ABP and ANA to drive up from the south and seize the Gowerdesh Bridge April 26.

“It was very in deft synchronized air-assault to get everybody in. Over four months of planning was put into this operation,” said Capt. John Williams, commander of Headquarters and Headquarters Troop, 1st Sqdn, 91st CAV (Airborne).

During the four-month planning phase, ABP were retrained on weapons, vehicle searches, first aid and reacting to contact, said Capt. Kafi Gwira, an ABP embedded tactical trainer from Chicago. The ABP were also issued new uniforms, weapons, ammunition and equipment for the operation.

“We got them ready to seize the bridge for good this time,” Gwira said.

The ANA built three local observation posts near the bridge during the first few days of the operation, which were handed over to the ABP a few days later.

According to Williams, the bridge is part of a route used by insurgents to travel from Pakistan into the interior of Afghanistan.

“If they can’t use the Gowerdesh Bridge, this severely limits



Capt. John Williams (left to right), commander of Headquarters and Headquarters Troop, 1st Squadron, 91st Cavalry Regiment (Airborne), observes the hill top while Staff Sgt. William Randall, HHT, directs Sgt. Shawn Seymour, a M-240B machine gun operator in HHT, during Operation Mountain Highway II April 27 in Nuristan province, Afghanistan.

their capabilities in this area,” he explained.

Last summer, insurgents drove off the ABP and destroyed their security check point. The Gowerdesh Bridge has been a key altercation point between insurgents and Afghan forces over the last year. Numerous fire fights between ISAF and insurgents have occurred near the bridge.

Operation Mountain Highway II is an ongoing operation, but according to Williams, it’s already a great success.

“Since we have secured this bridge, we can now bring development to this region,” Williams said. “We can fix the road and bring economic and government development here. The insurgents have lost the upper hand in this area.”



... and keep it

Within minutes of securing the Gowerdesh Bridge April 26, Engineers from Charlie Company, 62nd Engineer Battalion, such as Spc. Ben Kavanagh, right, rolled into the area, intent on building an Afghan Border Patrol checkpoint, complete with living quarters, bunkers, observation posts, and quality supply roads. The road, and the ability to safely travel it, are keys to stability in the area.

Although the bridge battle was a success, Operation Mountain Highway II is a continuing mission. Soldiers from the 1st Squadron, 91st Cavalry and 1st Battalion, 503rd Infantry Regiment provided overwatch security in support of the engineering mission jointly with the Afghan National Army, Afghan Border Police, as well as United States Marines (left).

(Photos by Staff Sgt. Brandon Aird)

