

NARRATIVE TO ACCOMPANY THE AWARD OF  
THE MEDAL OF HONOR

TO

STAFF SERGEANT ROBERT J. MILLER

Staff Sergeant Robert J. Miller, United States (US) Army, heroically distinguished himself by exceptionally valorous conduct in the face of the enemy of the US while serving as the Weapons Sergeant, Special Forces Operational Detachment Alpha (ODA) 3312, Special Operations Task Force (SOTF) – 33, Combined Joint Special Operations Task Force – Afghanistan (CJSOTF – A), Forward Operating Base (FOB) Naray, Konar Province, Afghanistan in support of Operation ENDURING FREEDOM. During the pre-dawn hours of 25 January 2008, ODA 3312 conducted a Combat Reconnaissance Patrol (CRP) to Gowardesh, Afghanistan to confirm or deny enemy activity and or Insurgents (INS) presence in the vicinity of Chen Khar in order to clear the valley of INS safe-havens. This area was known to have several High and Medium Value Targets massing and operating freely in the valley and three surrounding villages. The area of operations was also symbolically and strategically important because it was a Russian-era chokepoint, provided the enemy a tactical advantage due to its high-ground and deep valley summits, and was a well known INS stronghold. Insurgents had prepared reinforced Rocket Propelled Grenade (RPG) and small arms fighting positions with fortified overhead cover throughout the valley. They also amassed weapons caches comprised of RPGs, PKM medium machine guns, AK-47 assault rifles, ammunition, and food stores in the event of a protracted engagement. The enemy's confidence and morale was at a two - year high following a series of tactical successes against Afghan National Security Forces. The experience garnered from these battles, continued refinement of sophisticated tactics, techniques and procedures (TTP) including ambushes, and the expansion of INS forces in the region threatened Coalition forces ability to operate freely in this key terrain. Insurgents were confident in their ability to win any battle against Coalition forces on their own terrain. As the combined ODA and Afghan National Army (ANA) convoy neared its objective, ODA 3312 was forced to halt twice to dismount and explode INS emplaced boulders along its route. Sergeant Miller and other members of ODA 3312 recognized this TTP as a potential precursor to an INS ambush and immediately heightened security. Recognizing the historical enemy tactic used to canalize and ambush Coalition forces, the detachment

dismounted an overwatch element. Sergeant Miller led the overwatch elements as the threat of imminent danger increased. The rocky snow packed terrain, freezing temperatures, and a fierce wind chill further exacerbated the ODA's movement to the objective. The ODA's only Pashto speaker, Sergeant Miller took charge of the dismounted element and assembled partnered ANA forces to ensure they could move under cover. Once ODA 3312 arrived at the target compound, Sergeant Miller led the ANA and established security around the ODA's Ground Mobility Vehicles (GMVs). After security was established the team confirmed through the employment of an Unmanned Aerial Vehicle (UAV) that 15 – 20 INS were congregating and occupying prepared fighting positions in the targeted compound. Maintaining his situational awareness, Sergeant Miller immediately jumped into his vehicles turret and engaged the enemy with its mounted MK19 40mm automatic grenade launcher. From his vantage point in the turret of his vehicle, Sergeant Miller expertly described the engagement area to the Joint Tactical Air Controller (JTAC) and identified INS positions by engaging them with his MK19. As a result of his superior tactical skills he positively marked the enemy while simultaneously describing the area to the JTAC. Without his expert marksmanship and accurate description of the area, the JTAC would not have been able to provide accurate grid locations for Close Air Support (CAS). As noted by the team's JTAC, Sergeant Miller's involvement in the employment of CAS was largely responsible for the accuracy of four 30mm strafe runs and the emplacement of three precision guided GBU38 munitions on the objective. As a result of his efforts, two A-10 Warthogs and two F-15 Strike Eagles dealt lethal effects onto numerous enemy positions and disrupted their ability to maneuver. As Sergeant Miller continued to neutralize numerous INS positions, his MK19 sustained a catastrophic malfunction, which eliminated it for the duration of the battle. Without hesitation, Sergeant Miller quickly transitioned from the MK19 to an M240B machine gun mounted on the rear of his vehicle and continued to effectively engage the enemy. Understanding the peril of the battle and the composition of his force, Sergeant Miller moved from his firing position and began emplacing ANA Soldiers in positions to provide overwatch, detect movement from the high ground, observe the rear of the patrol, and provide security to the flank of the ground assault. His actions provided security for his team and enabled them to maintain their focus on enemy targets. Once ample security was established Sergeant Miller re-engaged the enemy. During a lull in fire, Sergeant Miller dismounted his GMV a second time to repair a malfunctioning Carl Gustav 84mm recoilless rifle. Upon completion of the initial contact and CAS, the ODA Commander directed a dismounted patrol to conduct Battle Damage Assessment (BDA) and a post CAS strike assessment of the destroyed INS positions. Sensing the need to provide the ANA additional assistance, the ODA Commander charged

Sergeant Miller with the responsibility to lead the partnered ANA force in an advisory role. With the proficiency of an already proven combat leader, Sergeant Miller briefed the ANA platoon leadership on the scheme of maneuver onto the objective in their native Pashto language. Sergeant Miller established rapport and instilled confidence in the ANA platoon leadership and its Soldiers despite being partnered with the ANA platoon only 30 minutes prior to the mission. Again, because of his tactical prowess, leadership, and command of the Pashto language, Sergeant Miller was selected as the point man for the dismounted patrol comprised of an Alpha and Bravo team from ODA 3312 and 15 ANA Soldiers. He led the patrol with his M249 Squad Automatic Weapon (SAW) across the Gowardesh Bridge toward the target area. During the movement, Sergeant Miller continually reinforced proper patrolling techniques as well as repeatedly adjusted and corrected the ANA rate of speed. Realizing that the engagement area was located in the mouth of a small, extremely steep, and narrow valley that created a natural choke point, Sergeant Miller directed the ANA to disperse from a file into a modified wedge. As Sergeant Miller and the lead element of the patrol entered the mouth of the narrow valley, they confronted an INS hiding behind a large boulder. Refusing to surrender, the INS leaped from the boulder yelled, "Allah Akbar!" and began firing on the lead element from approximately 5 meters. Sergeant Miller stepped forward to return fire and killed the INS instantly. This contact initiated a near-ambush from a company-sized group of INS. The INS forces fired on Sergeant Miller's patrol with multiple PKM machine guns, Rocket Propelled Grenades, and AK-47 assault rifles from distances of less than 25 meters. The patrol was completely vulnerable, in the kill zone, and without cover in a complex ambush with INS fighting positions located to the front (East), the left (North), and the right (South). It soon became evident that numerous INS occupied prepared, elevated, and hardened fighting positions in the mountain rock with overhead cover along the North and South valley ridgeline. Insurgents on the valley floor to Sergeant Miller's direct front, left, and right were fighting in defilade, and possessed ample cover and concealment necessary for the employment of overwhelming fires on the totally exposed patrol. As enemy fire erupted from the high ground, Sergeant Miller called out the contact report to his team members and his Detachment Commander located behind him. He simultaneously engaged multiple INS positions from a distance of approximately 15 to 20 meters. In the face of devastating INS fire, the ANA located directly behind Sergeant Miller broke formation and bound away downhill and out of the kill zone, leaving Sergeant Miller alone and with no support in the open terrain. To the front of Sergeant Miller's position one PKM machine gun and five AK47s were inflicting devastating hostile fire on the retreating ANA members and the remaining ODA patrol. Understanding the potential for catastrophe, Sergeant Miller boldly charged

the enemy and accurately engaged the entire force with his SAW, thus eliminating the threat. With heavy fire from INS forces from all sides of his position engulfing him, Sergeant Miller continued to engage at least four other INS positions, killing or wounding at least 10 INS. The darkness of the night and limited visibility, made Sergeant Miller's weapon, also the most casualty producing, the greatest threat to the INS ambush. The highlighted muzzle flash and the distinct sound from his SAW instantly marked Sergeant Miller as an easily identifiable target. Cognizant that his vulnerability increased with every burst from his SAW, Sergeant Miller continued to engage the enemy courageously drawing fire away from his team and onto his position. Within seconds, Sergeant Miller began receiving a majority of the INS' heavy volume of fire. Realizing that his team was pinned down and unable to actively engage the enemy, Sergeant Miller, with complete disregard for his own personal safety, continued to charge forward through the open area engaging multiple elevated INS positions and purposely drawing fire away from his trapped ODA members. Sergeant Miller's cover fire was so accurate that it not only provided the necessary cover to save his team, it also suppressed the enemy to the right flank of the patrol, to the point where they could not reposition from that direction against the ODA for the duration of the engagement. His actions single handedly provided the needed cover fire that allowed his fellow ODA members to maneuver to covered positions as the ANA broke formation and ran away from the kill zone. During his final charge forward, Sergeant Miller threw two hand grenades into fighting positions destroying the positions and killing or wounding an additional four INS. Only when Sergeant Miller realized his fellow team members were out of immediate danger, and in positions to support him, did he attempt to move for cover. As he directed his fire to engage enemy positions above him an INS shot him through the right side of his upper torso under his right arm; the area not protected by his body armor. Sergeant Miller immediately turned toward the enemy and shot and killed the INS who had wounded him. During this time, Sergeant Miller's Detachment Commander also sustained gunshot wounds to his upper chest and shoulder. The perilous situation forced the Detachment Commander to order the ODA to fall back to cover. Sergeant Miller realized his Commander was seriously wounded and that, as the point man with ODA's only SAW, he had the highest potential to inflict the most casualties on the enemy. Again, with complete disregard for his own personal safety, Sergeant Miller remained alone at the front of the patrol, so his team could bound back. Ignoring the severity of his critical wound and still completely exposed to intense, direct enemy fire, Sergeant Miller continued to low crawl through the snow, incessantly fighting uphill into the valley to engage INS positions to the East and South in order to draw fire away from his wounded Commander and identify INS positions to his fellow ODA members. Without his heroic efforts, his wounded Commander

would not have been moved safely out of the kill zone to the casualty collection point (CCP). Throughout the engagement, the INS fire around Sergeant Miller was so intense that his fellow team members could not see him due to the dust, debris, and RPG and small arms fire impacting around him. During the ensuing 25 minute battle, Sergeant Miller was mortally wounded by a second gunshot to his upper torso under his left arm. Despite suffering a second and fatal wound, Sergeant Miller remained steadfast and continued his selfless acts of heroism. He provided essential disposition and location reports of INS actions and he relentlessly fired his SAW until he expended all of his ammunition and threw his final hand grenade. At the first opportunity, members of Sergeant Miller's team bound up to his position to render aid and recover him. Enemy reinforcements overwhelmed the recovery team with direct fire causing the team to seek cover. During the recovery attempt, the enemy's precision was clearly evident as team members sustained multiple hits from small arms fire to their body armor and equipment. Approximately an hour and 45 minutes later, a Quick Reaction Force arrived, which allowed the ODA to lead a patrol back into the valley to recover Sergeant Miller. As a testament of the enemy's tenacity, the Quick Reaction Force sent to assist with recovery operations sustained additional casualties from intense direct RPG and small arms fire. Because of the enemy's dominance of the terrain and potential for loss of additional lives, the patrol was forced to use its second CCP and two MEDVACs. The entire battle lasted nearly seven hours. Post battle intelligence reports indicate that in excess of 140 INS participated in the ambush, more than 40 were killed, and over 60 were wounded. Sergeant Miller is credited with killing more than 16 and wounding over 30 INS. His valor under fire from a numerically superior force, complete selflessness and disregard for his own life, combined with his unmatched ability to accurately identify and engage INS positions, allowed his patrol to move to the safety of covered positions. Sergeant Miller chose to remain in the fight and provide vital suppressive fires to his teammates in order to save their lives, while disregarding his own mortality. Sergeant Miller's selfless acts saved the lives of his seven of his ODA members and 15 Afghan Soldiers. As a result of Sergeant Miller's heroic actions, the Gowardesh Insurgency was dealt a crippling blow, decimating INS forces involved in the battle, and shattering their morale and confidence. Sergeant Miller's actions exemplify the honored tradition of military heroism and reflect distinct credit upon himself, Special Operations Task Force – 33, the Combined Joint Special Operations Task Force – Afghanistan, Special Operations Command Central, and the United States Army.