

10th Mountain Soldier Posthumously Receives MoH

SEAN KIMMONS

A 10th Mountain Division squad leader credited with saving the lives of three of his Soldiers by throwing himself atop a suicide bomber posthumously received the Medal of Honor on 27 March.

SSG Travis W. Atkins went above and beyond the call of duty on 1 June 2007 while his unit — Delta Company, 2nd Battalion, 14th Infantry Regiment, 2nd Brigade Combat Team — conducted route clearance southwest of Baghdad.

During the mission, Atkins, 31, of Bozeman, MT, heard a report over the radio of suspected insurgents crossing an intersection in the Iraqi town of Abu Samak.

As the truck commander in his Humvee, Atkins ordered the driver to pull the vehicle up to the intersection so they could interdict the suspected insurgents. Once stopped, Atkins exited the vehicle and approached one of the men to check him for weapons while another Soldier covered him.

When Atkins attempted to search him, the man resisted. Atkins then engaged in hand-to-hand combat with the insurgent, who was reaching for an explosive vest under his clothing, according to an award citation.

Atkins then grabbed the suicide bomber from behind with a bear hug and slammed him onto the ground, away from his Soldiers. As he pinned the insurgent to the ground, the bomb detonated.



Atkins was mortally wounded by the blast. With complete disregard for his own safety, he had used his own body as a shield to protect his fellow Soldiers from injury. They were only feet away. Soon after, another insurgent was fatally shot by one of Atkins' Soldiers before he could detonate another suicide vest.

For his actions, Atkins was initially given the Army's second-highest award, the Distinguished Service Cross. Now that award has been upgraded to a Medal of Honor.

Before he joined the Army, Atkins worked for concrete and painting contractors and as an engine mechanic in Montana. He enlisted into the Infantry in 2000, and less than three years later he deployed to participate in the invasion of Iraq.

Atkins left the Army in late 2003, but he rejoined two years later and was assigned to the 10th Mountain Division. He deployed to Iraq again with the division in the summer of 2006 and became a staff sergeant in May 2007, a month before his death.

At Fort Drum, NY, the division honored Atkins by naming a fitness center after him in 2013. During the dedication ceremony, then-SGT Aaron Hall, who was Atkins' battle buddy, described the staff sergeant as a "quiet professional" who always had the respect of others.

"When my 4-year-old son Travis tells me his favorite superhero is Captain America and asks me who my favorite superhero is, my reply always has and will be Staff Sergeant Travis W. Atkins," Hall said.

According to his obituary, Atkins was also known to hunt, fish, camp, and ride snowmobiles. His first love, though, was his son, Trevor Oliver, who was 11 years old at the time of his father's death. Atkins was buried in his hometown of Bozeman in south-central Montana on 12 June 2007. He is also survived by his parents, Jack and Elaine Atkins.

Read more about Atkins at <https://www.army.mil/medalofhonor/atkins>.