

NURSING STUDENT SHOWS COURAGE UNDER FIRE

by Nicole Lindquist



In a word: **SURREAL.**

That's how Sgt. Heather Springer describes the mission in Iraq in which she braved enemy fire to rescue two wounded American combat troops.

Time seemed to move slower on that hot July day— just one month before her deployment was to end – as Springer jumped from a helicopter and yelled to her fellow soldiers over the barrage of bullets, “Cover me while I move.”

She knew the pilot would be forced to evacuate if she didn't hurry.

The 24-year-old flight medic and UNMC nursing student could've been killed, but instead saved the lives of two soldiers who had been wounded by improvised explosive devices.

For her courage, Springer received the annual, Army-wide Dedicated Unhesitating Service to Our Fighting Forces (DUSTOFF) Medic of the Year Award in March.

Springer also earned the Military Heroes Award from the Red Cross and the Bronze Star for Valor for her “exceptionally meritorious heroism” on July 15, 2007. She is the second female soldier in the Nebraska National Guard to do so.

“I don't consider myself a hero. I just did my job like anyone else would have,” she said. “Anybody in my situation would've done the exact same thing. It just happened to be me.

“I had been on a couple of other missions that were kind of hairy, but the intensity of this one was unmatched,” Springer

recalled. “I was so focused, I didn't realize the severity of the situation until afterward.”

Springer may never have been in combat if her application to UNMC's College of Nursing in Lincoln had been accepted the first time. She joined the Nebraska Army National Guard before she learned her reapplication had been accepted.

Following basic training, Springer returned to her native city of Lincoln and began attending nursing classes. About a month later, in late 2006, her unit – Company C (Air Ambulance) of the 2-135th General Support Aviation Battalion – was mobilized to Iraq.

As a flight medic, Springer transported patients from battlefields to hospital facilities. She flew approximately 200 missions, but it is that 10-minute mission in July that stands out in her mind the most.

“I got into the medical field to help people,” she said. “There's no way I could have left those soldiers. I'd never been left on the ground before. I just thought, ‘if I'm getting on that helicopter, they are too,’ cause we're like family. I wasn't thinking about awards at the time.”

There's a chance Springer could be deployed again, but first she would like to complete her degree.

“I've put school on hold enough,” she said, “but I'm not scared to go back and do my job.”

Her plan is to graduate with a bachelor's degree in nursing in May of 2010. Her selected specialty is fitting: emergency medicine. ☺☺