

**STAFF SERGEANT CLAYTON GORTON**

Practice makes perfect, and for U.S. Army Reserve Staff Sergeant Clayton Gorton, cross-training with NATO coalition troops while serving together in Afghanistan is one of the most important aspects of their mission.

“Working with foreign troops is a unique experience because we all have different ways of approaching situations,” said Gorton. “They are all very professional and they know what they are doing, but training together is really important to ensure that we respond to situations in the same way.”

In July 2009, Gorton was leading 15 German and American Soldiers through a grenade training session in Afghanistan. His group was situated behind a five-foot berm and the throwing line was 50 meters away.

“I told them when we were training that if any grenade didn’t make it over the berm, we were to get down to the ground quickly,” said Gorton, to avoid lethal injuries from the shrapnel.

As they came to the line one by one he instructed them to release the grenade and throw it over the berm. After the first fourteen Soldiers successfully detonated the grenades, Gorton watched as the last grenade was released and then hit the top of the berm, sending the live grenade back toward the throwing position. The German Soldier who threw the grenade turned to run, but Gorton jumped on the Soldier and threw him to the ground. As the grenade exploded about 15 feet away, sending shrapnel flying through the air, Gorton protected the Soldier from possible lethal injuries.

“When I tackled him to the ground, I was just taking my own advice,” he said. Gorton’s quick thinking might have saved the German Soldier’s life.

“I got up and thought that was a close one. And then I felt warm liquid running down my legs and the medical team was running toward me.”

Gorton had silver-dollar sized wounds in his legs that were two centimeters deep. He spent the next month recovering from his injuries, serving on restricted duty, but stayed with his unit in Afghanistan and completed his deployment. Since the incident, Gorton and the German Soldier have become good friends. Gorton said he hopes to visit him when he’s back in Germany.

For demonstrating courage and risking his own life, Gorton was awarded the Soldier’s Medal in June 2010.



*Ssg Clayton Gorton earned the Soldier's Medal for his actions while serving with NATO troops in Afghanistan.*

Gorton’s experience highlights an aspect of deployment which is often overlooked: Servicemembers not only face danger when engaging the enemy. In a war zone, training exercises and routine missions require utmost attention, and at times brave choices.

During his nine-month deployment to Afghanistan, Gorton’s primary responsibility was to mentor and train the Afghan National Army. Gorton’s responsibilities in Afghanistan were similar to his 2005 mission in Iraq, where he served on a military transition team as an advisor to the Iraqi Army.

Since returning from Afghanistan in February, 2010, Gorton has focused on his studies. He is pursuing a Bachelor’s Degree in Accounting at the University of Kentucky and plans to join ROTC in order to graduate as a Second Lieutenant. Gorton joined the Army directly after high school, following in the tracks of his father and grandfather.

“My family has always been real supportive,” said Gorton. “Pretty much whatever I’m doing they are always behind me.” said Gorton.