

SERGEANT ANDY LEE

Just when U.S. Marine Corps Sergeant Andy Lee thought he had reached the end of a long, exhausting day he was suddenly called to action by the eruption of enemy fire nearby.

Lee and his four-man team had spent the day providing heavy machine gun fire support to Bravo Company's 3rd platoon. Working to secure villages in the Nawa District of Helmand Province, Afghanistan, before upcoming elections, the platoon moved from house to house. As they entered and checked for weapons and IEDs, Lee and his team set up outside, ready to provide machine gun support in case it was needed.

That day, August 13, 2009, had passed without incident, Lee and his Marines were exhausted, nonetheless. Carrying their .50 Caliber Machine Gun and its required tripod, tools, and ammunition, they had traversed over 3 kilometers of extremely difficult terrain, each bearing a load of over 90 pounds, in heat of over 110 degrees.

"Pure pain" is how Lee described the feeling of carrying 95 pounds of equipment plus the protective gear they wore. No matter how strong, how in shape you are, he said, it's still going to hurt.

"But it has to get done. It would have been a really bad day if we weren't out there with that machine gun so I'm glad we did it."

The Marines moved out of one village and onto the next compound, each squad walking together, a few hundred meters separating each small group of men. As two of the squads were crossing a nearby tree line enemy fire erupted.

"All hell broke loose on that tree line," Lee said. "Two different squads came under fire."

The squad ahead of them began to receive small arms fire and rocket propelled grenade fire, and without hesitation, Lee pushed his machine gun team forward to assist.

"We were only roughly 500 meters from the actual squad when they started taking fire," he said. "We took the machine gun system fully assembled, rushed forward 200 meters, and started to fire."

Lee's machine gun team sprung into action and began laying down a heavy volume of suppressive fire towards multiple compounds to their due west. This instantly reduced the enemy's volume of fire, allowing the teams that were pinned down to begin their maneuver toward the compounds.

"I had to run back to get the ammunition," Lee explained. While he retrieving the heavy ammunition, and RPG struck and wounded the gunner on his team, he said.



U.S. Marine Corps Sergeant Andy Lee earned a Bronze Star with "Valor" while serving in Afghanistan during a 2009 deployment.

Again Lee sprang to action, running as fast as he could back to where the rest of his team was set up. Lee was able to coordinate the evacuation of injured Marine, while continuing to provide machine gun support to the team under fire.

"It's what we always want to do, as Marines," Lee said of his training and preparation for the fight that day.

Lee earned a Bronze Star with Combat Distinguishing "V" for his actions that day.

"Without any regard for his own health or well-being, Sergeant Lee continued to aggressively assault the enemy and lead his men with precision," his award citation states. "With vehicles not an option due to restrictiveness of the terrain, 3rd platoon, Bravo Company relied solely on Sergeant Lee's one machine gun... His personal valor, physical toughness, and devotion to the mission and the Marines he leads are above reproach."

"It's a humbling thing," Lee said of earning the medal. "It's what we do every day. If somebody said you did great, you can't really say you didn't. It's definitely an honor to wear it."

Lee cited his grandfather and great uncle who both served in the Army during WWII, he said. Lee is now the second in his family to wear the Bronze Star with "V"; his uncle earned one as well at Guadalcanal.