## MASTER SERGEANT JOSE ROJAS

After 16 years serving as a medical professional in the U.S. Army, Master Sergeant Jose Rojas committed to volunteer combat duty in Iraq. Through this assignment, Rojas' goal was to gain vital experience in the combat zone and make a personal contribution to Operation Iraqi Freedom.

On January 20, 2008, Rojas had this opportunity. Rojas was on his first deployment to Iraq, serving as the senior combat medic with a unit tasked to train Iraqi National Police. Stationed approximately 50 miles south of Bagdad, Rojas' unit was preparing to support the Iraqi Police in a mission to secure an important area that spanned five kilometers.

Rojas' main responsibility during this mission was to watch over the Iraqi medics and to help guide them in treating the wounded. However, as the Iraqi tanks near Rojas started taking heavy enemy fire, the Iraqi medics were unfortunately positioned two miles away from the combat zone.

Rojas received an urgent call informing him that an Iraqi tank was hit and there were Iraqi Police critically wounded. Although his main responsibility was to "mentor" and "train" the Iraqi medics, since they were still too far away, Rojas knew what he needed to do. He immediately dismounted from his vehicle and ran to the scene – if he didn't, he knew the Iraqi Soldiers would die.

"I said to myself, here we go. There is why I have trained for 16 years," said Rojas. "This is why I volunteered."

On the scene, Rojas started pulling the four wounded Iraqis from the destroyed vehicle and transporting them to the make-shift casualty collection point. He initiated triage and carefully treated each of the wounded – some with serious life-threatening injuries – despite bullets whizzing past him.

"As soon as the Americans got there, the enemy's fire intensified," recalled Rojas. "Bullets ricocheted off the walls behind me, hitting my (bullet-proof) vest. I just went into auto-pilot."

Rojas managed to treat and save the lives of all four wounded Iraqis despite very dangerous conditions. About 15 minutes into treating the wounded, a RPG was fired and landed about 50 meters away from where Rojas was working.

***MSG Rojas earned the Army Commendation Medal with Valor***

"I was trying to stabilize them and you hear the whizzing sound of a RPG coming close," remembered Rojas. "Although I was risking my life for the Iraqis, you realize that the lines are blurred in combat. I'm just trying to save the people that I'm responsible for."

Rojas and his team of three other medics were ultimately responsible for 500 Iraqi Soldiers. For providing medical treatment under combat pressure, saving the lives of the wounded and ultimately, serving his country selflessly, Rojas earned the Army Commendation Medal with Valor.

After the events of January 2008, Rojas stayed in Iraq for nine more months and completed his deployment. Today, Rojas is working at the Army Medical Research Institute in Texas.

"I hope to be deployed again soon. I see myself going back and I have no problem going back," said Rojas.