

Senior Chief Petty Officer Ralph E. Chavez



**San Antonio, TX
Bronze Star**

As Civil Affairs Team Sergeant on a voluntary mission to Afghanistan, then-Chief Petty Officer Ralph E. Chavez's team provided health care to more than 3,000 people, delivered more than 10,000 pounds of humanitarian aid, and administered 20 reconstruction projects across two provinces. For his efforts, Chavez was awarded the Bronze Star for service.

Winning the hearts and minds of the Afghan people has been a long-standing goal in this Global War on Terror. Chavez took that calling to heart when he volunteered in February 2006 to work in Afghanistan for about a year and a half.

"I just felt that as a chief, in order for me to lead my sailors by example, I wanted to do my part," Chavez told American Forces Press Service. "How can I tell my sailors one day that they need to volunteer if I had never done that?"

Throughout his tour, Chavez not only accomplished a lot, but also learned the customs, hopes, and dreams of the Afghan people. He and his team helped rebuild water wells and schools, delivered supplies, and set up temporary housing and provided aid after natural disasters.

He had the opportunity to use his language, diplomacy, and leadership skills as he carried out nearly 150 meetings with village elders, provincial governors, and cabinet ministers.

In addition, he assisted in the distribution of about 10,000 pounds of humanitarian aid to more than 200 villages across Lowgar and Paktia provinces.

Chavez also played a key role in the planning and execution of two Cooperative Medical Assistance operations that provided medical, dental, and veterinary health services to various areas in Afghanistan. He helped with some smaller medical operations. All told, these operations reached more than 3,000 local nationals in 50 villages.

As if this wasn't enough, Chavez was called upon to respond to gunfire from enemy forces attacking a local Afghan National Police station. Despite being there as a civil affairs officer, Chavez didn't hesitate to switch to the role of force protection to return small arms fire. He then helped to set up a defensive perimeter – actions deemed worthy of a nomination for the Navy Combat Action Ribbon.

Now that he has returned stateside, Chavez has been touring the country talking about his experiences as part of the Defense Department's "Why We Serve" outreach program.



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