

HEROES

Each week the Defense Dept. highlights the military men and women who have gone above and beyond in the global war on terror.



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2006 Expeditionary NCO of the Year

Air Force Tech Sgt. Mark DeCorte

The unique nature of the War on Terror calls for unconventional approaches to numerous missions. Joint service combat and non-combat operations have become more common over the last several years. While serving as a combat flight medic with the 33rd Expeditionary Combat Rescue Squadron in Afghanistan, Air Force Tech Sgt. Mark DeCorte was at the forefront of a successful Army-Air Force venture to improve rescue operations. DeCorte's leadership and actions on the battlefield earned him the 2006 Expeditionary Non-Commissioned Officer of the Year award.

In 2005, the Air Force agreed to assist the Army in medevac operations. DeCorte served on the first enlisted team of flight medics in this undertaking. There were many challenges not normally associated with providing care to the wounded on the battlefield. First, the team of airmen had to operate out of a HH-60 Pave Hawk helicopter, not the larger C-130 or C-17 the Air Force normally uses. Second, DeCorte and his team were directly involved in combat – unlike many medics who often enter the field after the action subsides. DeCorte even gave up his protected status under the Geneva Convention to provide more urgent care to the wounded.

Two missions in particular from 2006 illustrate DeCorte's gallantry. DeCorte was called in to rescue a soldier who lost both of his legs. As DeCorte entered the pitch-black battlefield, enemy forces surrounded him on three sides. Wearing night-vision goggles, DeCorte assessed the wounded soldier and applied tourniquets while shielding him from explosions. While taking fire, DeCorte carried the man back to the helicopter and ensured a safe evacuation. On another mission, DeCorte moved in to rescue two wounded soldiers. During the landing, enemy forces fired on the men on the ground, wounding three more. The helicopter landed near a dangerous minefield. DeCorte jumped out, and sprinted 150 yards through the kill zone. He treated all five wounded and directed them back to the chopper – while carrying one of them. DeCorte fit all five soldiers in the helicopter designed to hold two.

While based in Kandahar, DeCorte flew on 63 such missions, and is credited with assisting 41 enemy kills and 36 rescues, while constantly resupplying coalition forces with supplies, water and ammunition.

In addition to being named NCO of the Year, DeCorte's lengthy list of awards and decorations includes: the Air Medal with two devices, the Air Force Commendation Medal with two devices, the Air Force Achievement Medal with five devices, the Combat Readiness Medal, the National Defense Service Medal with one device, Afghanistan Campaign Medal, and the Global War On Terrorism Expeditionary Medal, among many others.



Tech Sgt. DeCorte with his HH-60

DeCorte's record of service long predates his actions in Afghanistan. His 13 years in the Air Force includes a tour in Kosovo. DeCorte's dedicated commitment to service extends to his family. His wife and brother are Air Force tech sergeants. DeCorte's father, mother and uncle also served as USAF medical sergeants. DeCorte is currently stationed at Minot Air Force Base in North Dakota.

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