

## MAJOR ROBERT ELDRIDGE

U.S. Army Major Robert Eldridge enlisted in December, 1986, joining the Special Forces Reserves.

"My father was in special forces and I knew quite a few people in Special Forces. I liked it. It sounded like what I wanted to do, so I pursued it," he said.

In 1997 he was commissioned as an infantry officer, where he served briefly before rejoining Special Forces as an officer as well.

In November of 2004 Eldridge deployed to Afghanistan for what should have been a deployment that lasted many months. But on Dec. 17, 2004 while conducting a patrol, Eldridge's vehicle, which was leading the patrol, hit an Improvised Explosive Device.

Eldridge was seriously injured, but the medic on his team, who had been driving the vehicle was able to begin treating him just minutes after the explosion. And within 30 minutes was been evacuated by a Blackhawk, he said.

Eldridge's leg had to be amputated as a result of the injuries, and he spent six months recovering in Walter Reed Medical Center.

Though Eldridge had the option to retire after his injury, he fought to stay in the Army.

"I could have medically retired but I fought to stay in," he said.

The benefits of being in Special Operations, he said, was the support he received from other Special Operations Soldiers up and down the chain of command, who visited him when he was in the hospital in Afghanistan and at Walter Reed.

"I wanted to go back," he said, "and my group commander and battalion supported my coming back."

They were following his recovery, making sure he was ok, and seeing if he wanted to stay in or not. In particular, he said, he benefitted from a Special Operations wounded warrior program called the Care Coalition.

Eldridge also had the support of his family throughout his recovery and decision to stay in the Army. They met him when he arrived at Walter Reed on December 19, 2004, he said.

Eldridge's family "absolutely" supported his going back to Special Operations, he said.



The Bronze Star with 'Valor'

"When I showed up I told them I was going back to my unit, and they thoroughly supported me through the entire process, he said.

Eldridge redeployed to Afghanistan in March of 2007.

"Within a month and a half of getting back to my unit, I started conducting airborne operations again," he said.

He said, "it was a good deployment. I got to stay the whole time."

Eldridge earned a Bronze Star with 'Valor' and a Purple Heart for the events of December 17, 2004.