



Duncannon, PA  
Bronze Star Medal

## Staff Sergeant Stephen Gouak

The efforts of Staff Sergeant Stephen Gouak during his tour in Iraq resulted in the safe disposal, sometimes under fire, of thousands of pounds of explosives, and many lives saved.

As an explosive ordnance disposal (EOD) team leader of the United States Marine Corps, Staff Sergeant Stephen Gouak has one of the most hazardous jobs there is, going closer to bombs, not farther away. During his tour in Iraq, Gouak led his team in disabling 190 IEDs, 1 suicide truck bomb, and over 45 weapons caches with a net weight of 6,300 pounds. His team's tremendous efforts saved many lives.

One particular instance stands out from his time there. In July 2007, his team got a call to assist another EOD unit collecting explosives after a fierce firefight. Once there, his group began recovering and disarming munitions in the area. They found more than 110 IEDs, plus suicide belts still on the dead bodies of the enemies. Altogether, the bombs weighed nearly 400 pounds. The team began to load up the explosives to be removed from the area. Suddenly, insurgents attacked again. For two hours, the American forces endured a barrage of small arms and rocket-propelled grenade fire. Gouak led the team's in their defense against the ambush.

A horrible thought struck him: What if the enemy rounds hit the pile of ordnance? Realizing the catastrophe that would ensue, Gouak seized the initiative, and evacuated the bombs from the area. Because of his quick thinking and steadfast courage, Gouak stopped what could have been a disaster for the troops there that day.

Thanks to Staff Sergeant Stephen Gouak's actions during his deployment, his team cleared an extraordinary amount of explosives. Without these efforts, many lives, coalition and Iraqi, would have been lost. He was awarded the Bronze Star Medal for his overall achievements in Iraq.

