



Wilmington, DE
Bronze Star Medal

Petty Officer James D. Hamill

A ribbon-cutting ceremony in a notoriously dangerous part of Afghanistan nearly became a graveyard if not for one sailor's resolve in the face of an oncoming suicide bomber.

Then-Petty Officer James Hamill, United States Navy, was trained as a command photographer, but in a flash, his mettle was tested, with 100 lives in the balance.

Working as a mass communications specialist, Hamill was serving with a Provincial Reconstruction Team in Khost, Afghanistan. On February 20, 2007, Hamill was assigned to document a momentous occasion, the opening of the Khost Provincial Hospital Emergency Room – a sign of progress in this dangerous province. Rumors and spotty intelligence came before the ceremony that warned of a possible suicide attack, but those involved with the project refused to back down and cancel the event. In the dense urban sprawl of Khost anything could happen, and Hamill's PRT considered goodwill events like this the key to an effective counterinsurgency.

Unbeknownst to the attendees at the event, including provincial officials, cabinet members, and national government figures, a suicide bomber had slipped through the Afghan police's outer security perimeter – dressed as a doctor – and was approaching the gathering. One vigilant American soldier became suspicious of the supposed doctor who was approaching the ceremony and stopped him. The soldier's instincts were right as he keenly spotted the explosive vest, and tackled the marauding bomber.

As the two wrestled on the ground, the alarm was sounded, and Hamill immediately dropped his camera, raised his rifle, and moved to act as the last defense for the assembly of citizens and VIPs. The bomber freed himself and charged forward, hoping to unleash his horrible weapon, but Hamill stood his ground. With his weapon raised, he opened fire less than ten feet away from the imposter. The bomber was repeatedly hit, fell to the ground, and triggered his lethal package.

The ferocious blast – stopped only by the keen eye of one sergeant and Hamill's unwavering determination – injured him and six other Americans, while sparing the hundred at the gathering of any casualties. Ignoring the shrapnel wounds to his abdomen, Hamill aided in performing life-saving first aid on the injured American soldiers who were worse off than him and ensured the area was secure in case of a follow-up attack.

The Major General of the 82nd Airborne at the time exclaimed that Hamill "prevented the bomber from inflicting catastrophic casualties," and praised his "extraordinary heroism" and "total dedication to duty." For his acts that day, he was awarded the Purple Heart for his wounds and the Bronze Star Medal with Valor for standing his ground against the suicide bomber.

