



Glendale, California
Army Commendation Medal

Sergeant Crystal C. Johnson

Exploding booby traps and an insurgent ambush forged then-Corporal Crystal Johnson of the U.S. Army into a leader and motivated her to become an Army medic.

Automatic weapons fire, IEDs, and injuries would not be enough to stop a young Army corporal from giving life-saving first aid while defending herself and her comrades. September 2006 would change the life of then-Corporal Crystal C. Johnson of the United States Army.

In a convoy of 17 moving through southeastern Iraq, Johnson was the driver in the lead vehicle. Suddenly the calm of an Iraqi night was broken by the deafening sound of an explosively formed penetrator – the most dangerous kind of improvised explosive device. In the chaos, Johnson brought her mangled and flaming truck to a halt as the convoy became the target of an ambush. Dazed, Johnson had to be pulled out the flaming cab by a fellow soldier, Specialist Truesdell, but she quickly regained her composure. Discovering their convoy commander had been slain in the blast, Johnson took control of the situation.

With the burning vehicle illuminating the desert night, Johnson and Truesdell reached into the flames and struggled to extricate their badly wounded translator. They just got him out alive as spare ammunition caught fire and began exploding in all directions.

The danger was not over. Unseen insurgents began firing at the marooned convoy, with rounds striking dangerously close. Truesdell began laying down suppressive fire with their only operational M16 and Johnson performed life-saving first aid on the gravely wounded man. As reinforcements arrived, Johnson refused treatment until all others were treated first, aiding many of the wounded with her own skills.

Johnson, so moved by this episode and her own reactions under such severe conditions, extended her deployment and became a fully qualified Army medic. The September 12th incident would earn her a Purple Heart and an Army Commendation Medal with Valor, a more than promising start to a career of protecting and preserving human life.

