

# 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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## Air Force Staff Sgt. Jessica Kuge

In counterinsurgency campaigns, more so than in other types of warfare, success on the battlefield results from quickly incorporating lessons learned into future operations. To do so, however, requires accurate, up close and personal documentation from the heart of the battle. From September 2006 to January 2007, Air Force Staff Sgt. Jessica Kuge served as a Joint Combat Camera Videographer in the Diyala province, constantly risking her safety over several months to record house to house raids, weapons searches, convoy patrols, and other combat and humanitarian operations by coalition forces. Her professionalism and bravery during these diverse missions earned her the Bronze Star.

Her days were often spent hauling 60 pounds of gear, an M-16 in one hand, and a camera in the other. And when bullets started flying, she effortlessly switched to a combat role. "I know how important it is to document what's happening, but there were times I had to drop the camera and I went for the weapon," she told the Santa Maria Times. On one occasion, after snipers targeted her unit during a house search, she continued documenting an engagement as she faced direct fire. That operation resulted in coalition forces killing four Al Qaeda terrorists and detaining another seven. Another time, Kuge came to the aid of a wounded Iraqi soldier, making sure he received medical aid and was evacuated from the battlefield. Kuge also recorded an ambush on an Iraqi police checkpoint in its entirety, helping ensure that others know what they might expect to face on the battlefield.



Chicago, IL  
*Bronze Star recipient*

In all, Kuge spent more than 700 hours in the field – more than twice the average time for videographers – on 40 combat and humanitarian missions. She obtained more than 30 hours of footage. In addition to aiding future combat operations, the footage recorded by Kuge also helped counter propaganda from enemy forces and inform the local population and media about coalition actions. Her various "population engagements" took her to local hospitals, meetings with Iraqi women, and soccer games with Iraqi youth.



Kuge received the Bronze Star on September 27, 2007. Having already spent eight years in the military, Kuge recently re-enlisted in the Air Force, and is joining the 1st Combat Camera Squadron in Charleston, S.C., the only active duty combat camera squadron in the Air Force.

Santa Maria Times [story](#)