



Riverview, MI
The Bronze Star with 'Valor'

While taking small arms fire, Marra disregarded his personal safety and ran across the kill zone into a hostile area where the severely damaged M1151 Up-Armored HMMWV was located, in order to render first aid to his fellow soldiers. Marra climbed on top of the overturned vehicle, exposing himself to enemy fire that was landing immediately next to the vehicle as well as on the wall just behind him, and proceeded to open the vehicle door and extract the men inside.

"This was like déjà vu," remarked Marra. He continued to explain.

"We were on a previous mission just 20 days prior when we were ambushed in the same area, same way, by some of the same insurgents. During that instance, we lost our medic, Cpl Rachel Hugo."

That memory was still fresh in the minds of Marra's unit. It was this instant flashback and moment of reflection and loss, according to Marra, that gave him the courage and confidence to do what was necessary.

"One thing I remembered is that I looked across the alley and saw the exact spot where Hugo was killed. The circumstance we were in (now) was violent and ugly, but that moment of clarity gave me strength to persevere and will forever be etched in my mind," said Marra.

The gunner had been ejected and sustained shrapnel injuries. The driver was unharmed, but one soldier didn't make it.

SERGEANT JOHN A. MARRA, JR

Sergeant John Marra's military career began in the U.S. Army Reserve in 2004. He was assigned to his first duty assignment with the 303rd Military Police Company, 785th MP Battalion, 300th MP Brigade when they deployed to Iraq in September of 2006. During this deployment, Marra served as an MP Transition Team leader in the rank of corporal and heroically distinguished himself through exceptionally valorous conduct in the face of the enemy of the United States.

On October 24, 2007, the mission of the day was quite dangerous.

"Our task was to travel to nearly every police station in our area of operations, which included several hot spots," explained Marra. "The unit that was set to replace us was training on the road with us. Accounting for the risk that we assessed, we discussed what would occur if different scenarios came up. Ironically, the event that occurred later that day was one of the events for which we worked out a battle drill."

Marra was in the second vehicle of a four vehicle combat patrol in Baiji, Iraq, when an improvised explosive device struck the fourth vehicle flipping it onto the driver's side and trapping three soldiers inside. Marra immediately left the safety of his M1117 Armored Security Vehicle and began to make his way to the blast site.



HEROES

"SFC Towns was a National Guard relief on his first tour. I felt really bad because he and the others depended on us to train them up to speed. He had a son and daughter in Iraq at the time," Marra said.

Another soldier -- the squad leader -- was injured. Once free, Marra helped to lower him down and behind cover. Seeing his squad leader unresponsive with a very weak pulse and barely breathing, Marra inserted a nasal pharyngeal airway into his nose, which is believed to have saved him from choking to death.

"She (Hugo) taught us well. She taught us how to save lives, and would have been proud," said Marra.

When it was clear that the wounded soldier needed to be taken to a more advanced medical treatment facility, Marra once again demonstrated exceptional courage and the utmost loyalty for his fellow soldier by volunteering to take his wounded squad leader in the back of a local Iraqi Police non-armored pick-up truck to the Iraqi Police Station where coalition medical personnel were standing by. Marra helped load the casualty into the bed of the Iraqi Police truck and then continued to perform lifesaving measures on his patient while traveling through the heart of one of the most dangerous cities in his area of operation.

While traveling a half mile to the Iraqi Police Station in the back of an open-bed non-armored Iraqi Police truck, Marra continually performed CPR on his wounded squad leader in order to keep him alive. Marra's actions, tremendous determination, quick thinking, extraordinary ability to stay calm under fire and undeniable courage directly contributed to the saving of his squad leader's life.

"When it came time to perform lifesaving measures without her (Hugo), our squad executed the battle drill and performed as one cohesive unit. Every piece fit together and we made it out of a situation that could've easily been worse."

Anytime a fellow soldier falls, it is a sad day. In this instance, Marra was able to take what the enemy meant for evil, and use it later to save lives. For his selfless acts, he was awarded the Bronze Star with Valor device.