

MAJOR MATTHEW

When U.S. Army Major Matthew deployed to Oruzgan province in Southern Afghanistan in October of 2005, he didn't know he'd be spending the following 120 days in a remote location, high up in the mountains, the nearest support and supplies a five hour drive away.

Matthew was serving as the Detachment Commander for a Special Forces team of 11 soldiers, their mission to run "patrols to secure the legitimacy of the Afghan government within the Khas Oruzgan area," he explained.

"It was interesting," he said of the deployment, "because there were two Special Forces teams with approximately 20 Afghan soldiers and the nearest reinforcements were approximately a five hour drive away. We were at the end of the logistics line, high in the mountains. Support was quite a ways away."

These U.S. Army and Afghan National Army Soldiers learned to live together and work together on what started out as a "rudimentary base". And over the next 120 days they got to know each other very well, he said.

The reality of being stationed at the end of the logistics supply line hit home for Matthew when the helicopter he was traveling crashed. Matthew was mildly injured in the crash he said.

"On a Special Forces team we are lucky if we have one medic," he said. "And my one medic was pinned under the helicopter, the helicopter resting on his helmet."

Fortunately they were able to pull him out, he said.

But being so far away from outside support, the 10 people on the helicopter were lucky that another team was nearby and were able to come in, also in an helicopter, and medevac the injured soldiers very quickly.

Matthew earned a Bronze Star for his service in the deployment, though not just for his actions during the helicopter crash, he said.

"It was more for all the interactions throughout the deployment," he said.

Matthew, who was commissioned as an officer in May of 1999, said the main thing he learned during the deployment was what a chaotic place Afghanistan can be.

He and his team spent the majority of the deployment helping the locals rebuild their infrastructure, he said, and in that time they were able to build wells and a school.



The Bronze Star

"You really need to understand their tribal affiliations," he said of working with the local community. But once those affiliations are learned, it becomes much easier to aid the community.

"They're very good soldiers," Matthew said of the Afghan National Army Soldiers. "They just don't have the skills, they haven't had the same type of training that we have here in the U.S."

As Detachment commander he was in charge of the team everything the team did, he said.

"We go into an area to see what will increase the legitimacy of the government. It depends on whatever the area needs at that time, then we come up with a plan," he said.

"His personal courage and commitment to mission accomplishment in a combat zone, under the most extreme of circumstances, greatly contributed to the overwhelming success of the global war on terrorism," his award citation states.

He also earned a Bronze Star for a subsequent deployment to Afghanistan from August of 2006 to March of 2007.

Matthew cited both of his Detachment Team Sergeants as good role models for him during the deployments.

"I think both of my team sergeants were good role models, especially when you bring a young captain in... Team sergeants have a very dramatic effects on commanders," he said.