

MAJOR JOHN MCCONNELL, JR.

U.S. Army Major John T. McConnell, Jr. distinguished himself in the performance of outstanding service to the United States as the Adjutant for Special Operations Task Force-Central, Baghdad, Iraq from August 25, 2006 until March 25, 2007.

McConnell provided personnel support to over 870 personnel, including Army, Navy, Air Force, National Guard, civilian employees, contractors, and the Iraqi Special Operations Force.

McConnell maintained accountability for all personnel across the battlefield to include over 150 interpreters and 1,500 Iraqi Special Operation Forces Soldiers. His work enabled the commander to have accurate information on personnel strength and readiness. This made it possible for four Special Forces Companies, 25 Operational Detachments and a Naval Special Warfare Task Unit to be effectively manned.

"The most interesting, challenging part [of the deployment] would be that I'm an AG guy," McConnell said, referring to his role as an Adjutant General, which he described as a "paper pusher type of guy."

"I was fortunate enough to work with a Special Forces Unit," he said. "Not just because they were great guys to work with, the cream of the crop, but also to see how to do their jobs."

McConnell was also intricately involved in all other critical personnel functions, including casualty reporting, managing the Task Force's distinguished visitors, Morale Welfare and Recreation, daily Joint Personnel Status Report, evaluations, awards, mail, personnel actions, finance, and promotions.



Northern Virginia
The Bronze Star

In addition to these functions, McConnell conducted over 15 combat operations with a Special Forces Detachment alongside a Battalion of the Iraqi Special Operation Forces Brigade.

Being able to go out on missions with the Special Forces soldiers was another rare opportunity this deployment offered, McConnell said.

During one operation in the very hostile Sadr City, McConnell served as a M240B gunner on the back of an assault vehicle.

"That was the most action...that I ever saw," McConnell said.

During the convoy's journey, the vehicle he was riding in began receiving small arms and machine gun fire. He returned fire on the fighting position and ensured the convoy's safe exit from the area.

"Surprisingly it was not [scary]," McConnell said. Rather he described it as "almost surreal".

"Training kind of kicks in," he said. "It was just kind of instinctive to kind of crouch down and lay some suppressive fire."

The Special Forces detachment was "so well trained, so well prepared, so heavily armed, you feel comfortable riding around in the back of an open humvee, rather than the heavily armored ones that everyone else rides in. It's an atmosphere that they produce," he said.



HEROES

McConnell also worked diligently to provide the funding needed to rebuild the Hillah Special Weapons and Tactics office after a bomb placed on the building detonated, destroying the building and killing the Commander and Executive Officer inside. Getting this funding proved especially challenging, so McConnell's efforts went a long way in increasing the trust and confidence of the Iraqi police in Coalition Forces.

"McConnell's hard work and dedication greatly contributed to the operational success of the command's mission," according to the narrative of his award citation.

"It was a really good experience," McConnell said.

