



San Antonio, TX  
The Bronze Star with 'Valor'

## MAJOR ORLANDO ORTEGA

Major Orlando Ortega was responsible for leading approximately 200 soldiers in Iraq as the commander of G Battery 202 Air Defense Artillery.

He led his unit to conduct more than 650 missions in different parts of Iraq without losing any soldiers. This was no small feat, and Ortega will be the first to say that you can never become too comfortable.

Sept. 15, 2004, was a perfect case in point. The day started as a 'routine' reconnaissance mission, and ended with two roadside bombs and ground combat operations against enemy forces that earned Ortega the Bronze Star with Valor.

"During this time (that he was in Iraq), the main routes were being heavily targeted by insurgents," says Ortega as he begins recounting the incident.

The 7 a.m. mission for the six vehicle convoy and 30 soldiers was to recon new routes to move the brigade south to Kuwait in the upcoming year.

"It took 17 hours from start to finish with several stops to refuel. The trip south towards Kuwait was very long with few a roadside bombs and sniper attacks," Ortega continued.

"The return trip was a different story... we were southeast of Baghdad returning to our forward operating base in the north. A loud roadside bomb exploded and my vehicle stopped," Ortega continued. What happened next seemed to happen in slow motion. Immediately, I checked my legs to ensure they were intact."

"My driver was slumped over the steering wheel and the passengers in the rear were stunned. We received small arms fire from the second and third floor of a building on our right."

When asked about the condition of his troops, Ortega said no one was seriously injured. Everyone was just stunned by the impact. When they got their bearings, they discovered they were in a kill zone and 7-10 insurgents armed with AK47 were in and around a three-story building.

Still in the midst of the kill zone, Ortega guided the convoy forward about 100-150 meters. Then the insurgents attacked the last vehicle of the convoy as their target



# HEROES

"After a split second of weighing my options I decided to conduct a counter attack," said Ortega. "It was an extremely difficult decision to make knowing the threat to my soldiers' lives."

However, the last vehicle was being pounded, even though they persevered returning fire.

Once clear of the ambush site, Ortega successfully led the convoy in two counter-attacks, each time employing accurate and deadly fire as he maneuvered the convoy to engage the enemy.

According to the award citation, Ortega "successfully defeated the anti-Iraqi forces with no friendly casualties or major equipment damage."

"Within 48 hours my soldiers were back on new missions. Incidents like this one occur every day in Iraq but go untold," concluded Ortega.

His heroism and dedication to his fellow soldiers on the battlefield upholds the finest traditions of military service, the citation reads.

Reflecting on his troops, Ortega said, "The U.S. should be proud of the soldiers that defend our country every day."

