



Hometown, ST

Bronze Star Medal with Combat Distinguishing Device

According to his award, Slusher repeatedly exposed himself to enemy fire in order to direct his team's defensive actions and advise the Iraqi battalion commander in combat.

"Mark was able to convince the Iraqi battalion commander to stay in the area where he was at," Western said. "He stayed there shoulder-to-shoulder with the battalion commander. He gave him time to get over his concerns and become a combat commander."

This same quick action and presence of mind was displayed while elements of the MTT were exiting the Basra city limits, after conducting a combat patrol. One of the transition team's vehicles was attacked by an explosively formed penetrator, which is an improvised explosive device commonly used to penetrate armor at stand-off distances. The device destroyed the vehicles and wounded all five members inside.

Slusher immediately retrieved the injured personnel from the burning vehicle while under steady small arms fire, and moved them to a covered position to administer first aid. His citation said his actions resulted in a successful air and ground casualty evacuation of the injured Marines.

"We operate there alone and unafraid," Slusher said, speaking of how a MTT functions. "Everyone knew their roles and I was truly blessed with the men I had on my team. It's great to know we were able to positively influence what happened in Basra and the rest of the country."

Excerpt from article by Cpl. Aaron Rooks, Marine Corps News, January 12, 2009

Major Mark Slusher

Maj. Mark Slusher is one of many advisors that serve among battalions, brigades and divisions of the Iraqi military. He trained, lived, ate and became brothers-in arms with them. Slusher, along with the three-week Basra Campaign, showed just one example of how that developed relationship can influence the growing Iraqi military.

The Lebanon, N.J. native was awarded a Bronze Star Medal with a combat distinguishing device, Jan. 12, for heroic achievement in connection with combat operations against insurgency in the city of Basra that contributed to the success of Iraqi forces in the region.

Slusher served as team leader for Military Transition Team 111 of 1st Battalion, 1st Brigade, 1st Iraqi Army Division from Aug. 22, 2007 to Aug. 17, 2008. During this time, he simultaneously advised the Iraqi Army battalion commander and led his 15-man MTT through combat operations that cleared multiple insurgent strongholds and weapons cache sites throughout the city, according to Slusher's award citation.

"Its fire in the belly courage and leadership," said Brig. Gen. Juan G. Ayala, commanding general of 2nd MLG. "It's because of American advisors putting their lives on the line that the Iraqi Army is on its feet."

Ayala, having served as senior advisor to the 1st Iraqi Army Division the year prior to Slusher's tour, said the efforts of American military members make this a very significant time in U.S. and Iraqi history. Ayala went on to say Slusher's efforts epitomize military advisors and show how much of an impact they can have.

Lt. Col. Chuck Western, who served with Slusher as the brigade MTT leader, said Basra was a dangerous place at the time they were there. Slusher's team and the Iraqi battalion were bombarded by continuous mortar and small arms fire in the early days of the campaign.

