

Paratrooper earns Bronze Star Medal with "V" and Purple Heart for selfless actions

49th Public Affairs Detachment

Story by [Pfc. Alleea Oliver](#)

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FORT BRAGG, N.C. – Sgt. Nikolas R. Ramirez, a 2nd Battalion, 504th Parachute Infantry Regiment, 1st Brigade Combat Team, 82nd Airborne Division infantry Paratrooper, was awarded Bronze Star Medal with a Valor device and Purple Heart during an award ceremony, Dec. 13 inside the Division Headquarters at Fort Bragg, North Carolina.

While returning from a routine security mission, Ramirez, a Columbus, Georgia, native, rescued a fellow Paratrooper from a burning military vehicle that was struck by a vehicle-borne improvised explosive device in August while deployed to Afghanistan, in support of Operation Freedom's Sentinel.

After being struck by the VBID the vehicle flipped. Ramirez found himself stuck between the door and the driver while the vehicle filled with smoke and fire.

"Next thing I know, I'm on my side," said Ramirez. "Nobody was expecting it.

"I realized I had about 35 to 45 seconds to get out of there or I was going to die," he added remembering thinking to himself that he wasn't going to make it home alive.

In the face of death, Ramirez quickly called for assistance.

"Help, help, I am burning alive," he shouted.

As seconds faded away, Ramirez spotted a chance to fight for his life and quickly removed his body armor to escape out a hole in the vehicle.

"I kept pulling on my quick release as if my life depended on it, because it did," said Ramirez.

Sustaining a broken elbow and hand, but having crawled free of the vehicle, he quickly turned his attention back to the vehicle.

Walking around the truck and looking into the gunner's hatch, Ramirez fortunately found the vehicle gunner alive but wounded. He reassured him he was going to be okay.

"Hey man, you are alright" said Ramirez. "I'm going to get you out of here."

With the help of an Afghan citizen who came to his aid, they reached in and pulled his fellow Paratrooper out by his harness.

Both Paratroopers moved away from the burning vehicle until the remainder of their platoon arrived to provide aid.

Despite Ramirez's injuries, his steadfastness to the Army Values enabled him to save his battle buddy's life within minutes.

"He lives the Army Values, and exemplifies what it means to be a Paratrooper," said Col. Tobin Magsig, the 1st

BCT commander. "This valorous act epitomizes his selfless service and is a testament to his character."

Humbly, Ramirez said that with the type of bond forged between Paratroopers any of them would have done the same if put in that situation.

In spite of the trauma endured on his first deployment, Ramirez said he is glad to be home with his family and to still be serving in the U.S. Army.

"Being a part of the 82nd Abn. Div. and doing something for my country, my family and my friends is what motivates me," said Ramirez the son of a former U.S. Army infantryman. "That is what keeps me motivated and driven to do the right thing."

The Bronze Star Medal is the fourth highest decoration for valor awarded to service members for their heroic or meritorious actions, and the Purple Heart is awarded to those wounded or killed while serving in the U.S. Armed Forces.