



# Purple Heart awarded to truck commander

**Staff Sgt. Ryan Hansen**

386th AEW/PA

CAMP ARIFJAN, Kuwait – With cargo tied down and ready to be moved into Iraq, Airmen of the 70th Medium Truck Detachment took a moment from their mission to line up in formation Aug. 2, to honor one of their own.

They gathered up to see Staff Sgt. Michael Stewart, a truck commander with the 70th MTD, presented a Purple Heart for his actions during an improvised explosive device attack July 21.

On this particular night Sergeant Stewart and his wheel man, Airman 1st Class Joshua Collins, were on the job cruising down the highway in the lead truck on a convoy mission about five miles north of Balad Air Base, Iraq.

This night was starting out the way most ‘normal’ nights do in the AOR for members of the 70th MTD. They, along with the 424th MTD, belong to the 586th Expeditionary Mission Support Group. These two Air Force detachments conduct medium truck convoys for the Army on a daily basis, transporting equipment into Iraq.

However, as the two transporters led the convoy north towards Mosul, Sergeant Stewart spotted a possible IED in the center of the road. It was at that moment the night became anything but ‘normal’ for members of the 70th MTD, when in the blink of an eye an IED exploded.

“I was just reaching over to



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**Staff Sgt. Michael Stewart, 70th Medium Truck Detachment, salutes Col. Paul Curlett, 386th Air Expeditionary Wing commander, after being presented with a Purple Heart Aug. 2.**

(call it in) when it hit,” Sergeant Stewart said. “My initial thought was that we were going to be able to make it past it without it going off and we’d be able to get the rest of the convoy stopped, but everything happened so quickly.”

As the smoke cleared from the blast Sergeant Stewart quickly gathered his thoughts. He yelled at Airman Collins, who is known as “Cowboy” to his friends, to see if he was injured.

“Cowboy just kept saying, ouch, ouch, ouch.”

Sergeant Stewart, not realizing he was hurt as well, moved over to check on Airman Collins and was met by the convoy commander, Technical Sergeant Esteban Ochoa and Airman First Class Clyde Rankins. Airman Collins had taken quite a hit and the team had to work quickly to stabilize him by performing combat life support.

“Everyone did their job,” Sergeant Ochoa said. “I’ve

never been more proud in my Air Force career than how everyone reacted that night.”

With Airman Collins being transported from the scene by helicopter to the Air Force Theater Hospital at Balad, the 70th MTD worked to get their convoy out of harm’s way. They quickly got the situation under control and then moved towards Balad as well. There they could find out how their comrade was doing, get Sergeant Stewart checked out and make the necessary repairs to get the convoy back on the road.

Luckily for Sergeant Stewart, his injuries were not as bad as his friend’s, Airman Collins.

“The IED came right through and clipped my ear,” he said. “But I told them I didn’t need any more holes in my head, so they just put some strips on there and sent me away.”

Now, just a few short weeks after the incident with the battle damaged truck sitting on a

flatbed trailer over his left shoulder, Col. Paul Curlett talked to the Airmen in formation about the history of the decoration and how proud he was to present the medal to Sergeant Stewart.

“We’re here today to honor Sergeant Stewart for his bravery,” said the 386th Air Expeditionary Wing commander. “Just take a look at this truck. This is what you all face on a daily basis and you truly deserve our thanks and praise.”

After Colonel Curlett presented Sergeant Stewart with the Purple Heart, all of his comrades from the 70th and 424th MTD lined up to give him a hug and shake his hand.

“This is what these guys face everyday on the road,” said 1st Lt. Joe Barber, 70th MTD commander. “They never know what they’ll encounter. It’s a dangerous business.”

“Sergeant Stewart is the epitome of an Air Force staff sergeant and he really represents what these transporters are all about,” said Chief Master Sergeant Tony Killion, 70th MTD chief. “They love doing this and can’t wait to get back out there.”

Looking back at the event, Sergeant Stewart said he was thankful for the training they were given and proud of all the Airmen in his detachment.

“I really have to thank Airman Rankins for reacting as quickly as he did,” he said. “I was too shook up to get the IV in and he really came in and took control. But we have a really tight team here and I love working with all of them.”