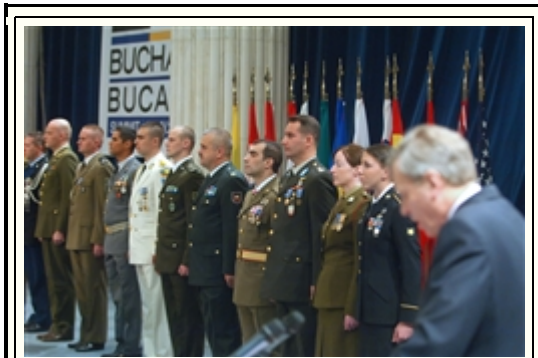




U.S. Silver Star Recipient Honored at NATO Summit

By Fred W. Baker III
American Forces Press Service

BUCHAREST, Romania, April 3, 2008 – Deep within the cavernous marble walls of the Palace of the Parliament here today sat two Texans, casually talking about – what else – Texas.



Army Spc. Monica Brown, far right, stands with 25 other soldiers representing all 26 nations of the NATO alliance during an April 3, 2008, ceremony during the NATO Summit Conference in Bucharest, Romania, honoring those who have served in NATO operations around the world. Brown received the Silver Star for heroism in combat in Afghanistan. NATO photo
(Click photo for screen-resolution image):[high-resolution image](#) available.

The first was President Bush, here for the first full day of NATO talks. The second was Army Spc. Monica Brown, here to help kick off the first full day of the talks.

Brown, 19, is first woman U.S. soldier to receive the Silver Star for combat in Afghanistan. Brown and 25 other soldiers, all from NATO allies who have served in NATO operations, gathered at the start of the day to be honored by those gathered for the largest summit conference in the alliance’s history.

At the start of the first meeting of the North Atlantic Council this morning, the group marched before the great circle of presidents and prime ministers, heads

of state and governments and hundreds of others gathered from around the world.

“Our soldiers, airmen, sailors and Marines frequently put themselves in harm’s way so that we can be safe in our countries and our homes,” said NATO Secretary General Jaap de Hoop Scheffer. “It is therefore appropriate that we start today’s meeting by paying tribute to the professionalism and dedication of the more than 60,000 men and women who are currently deployed in NATO-led mission and operations.”

A moment of silence followed in honor of those who have died fighting in NATO operations.

For the small-town girl turned combat medic, it was all a little “overwhelming” she said.

With only a few months more than two years of service, Brown's career has catapulted her from patching up troops under gunfire in Afghanistan to standing before some of the most powerful people on Earth. Vice President Richard B. Cheney presented her medal last month at Bagram Air Base, Afghanistan. Today, Brown met with Bush.

"Overwhelming," Brown said just before her meeting with the president. "I can't believe I'm actually here and about to meet him.

"I didn't ever realize I would be meeting the president of the United States. It's amazing. Absolutely amazing," she said.

Brown's journey began at 17 years old in Lake Jackson, Texas, where she joined the Army with her older brother. He is her "best friend," Brown said, and they intended to attend training together. But he joined as an infantryman and was sent to a combat line unit that women are not allowed to join.

Her brother now serves in Afghanistan.

Brown received the Silver Star for heroism while providing aid under heavy gunfire to soldiers whose Humvee had been hit by an improvised explosive device during a convoy almost a year ago.

It was dusk on April 25, 2007, and Brown was assigned to the 782nd Brigade Support Battalion, 4th Brigade Combat Team, 82nd Airborne Division. The convoy was on a routine security patrol in Afghanistan's isolated Jani Khail district when her convoy was attacked by insurgents.

The Humvee following hers in the convoy was hit. Brown left her Humvee to give aid to the injured soldiers, and the group began taking small-arms fire from all directions.

"I was praying the whole time. I was hoping they weren't in a serious condition and they were still alive when I got to them. I'm just glad they all got out of there (alive)," Brown said.

Other soldiers in her platoon fired back. It was then that the situation went from bad to worse, when a truck loaded with ammunition caught fire and exploded rounds into the air.

According to reports, rounds were whizzing by inches away from Brown. But, she said, she wasn't paying attention to what was going on around her. Her focus was on two soldiers: Spcs. Stanson Smith and Larry Spray, who both had suffered life-threatening injuries.

Brown eventually was able, with the help of others, to load Smith and Spray into another vehicle and escape the gunfire and mortar rounds for a more stable area, where she continued rendering aid and called for a medical evacuation.

The event lasted about two hours in the dark of night. She later described it as a “blur.”

Both soldiers lived, but today Brown hesitates to take too much credit. She is only the second woman since World War II to receive the Silver Star.

“I just did my job. I didn’t expect any recognition for it,” she said. “I think that the men I was with that day should be recognized more than me, because without them I wouldn’t be alive right now.”

Still, Brown said today is more about who she represents standing before the president and the other world leaders at the summit.

“It’s an honor to be here to represent the United States, and the 82nd Airborne Division, and my unit and everyone that was in combat with me in Afghanistan,” Brown said.