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## Cameras and Combat Photographers among 7 receiving Bronze Star

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It's 1 p.m., Aug. 16, on a white-hot highway 70 miles west of Baghdad. One soldier is down, felled by a sniper, and bullets kick up dust a few yards from Air Force Tech. Sgt. Jeremy Lock. "Cover me!" he yells to a U.S. gunner.

Adrenaline floods his body, and he runs as fast as he can, faster than he thought possible, to get even closer to the action. Armed with a Nikon digital camera, Lock starts shooting ... photographs.

On Monday, Lock and four other Charleston-based Air Force combat camera photographers and videographers, along with two security officers, were awarded Bronze Stars.

For Lock and others in the 1st Combat Squadron, the medals are reminders of the inherent risks in capturing images of war, along with the difficult decisions they sometime make. Most photographers, for instance, aren't faced with the choice of shooting a photograph or a person.

But the afternoon of Aug. 16, Lock photographed soldiers crouching behind cars as bullets whizzed in from a field. He turned his lens toward the soldiers tending to the fallen GI. And, when they needed a hand, he picked up the soldier's M-4 rifle and provided cover until the GI was pulled to safety and would survive. Then Lock switched back to his camera.

"I don't consider myself a fighter, but if I want to see my (two) boys again, I know I might have to pick up a gun," Lock said.

Staff Sgt. Richard Rose, 23, faced a similar decision after insurgents ambushed his patrol last summer. He dropped his camera and picked up an M-4 rifle. "The politically correct way to say it is that I fired until there was no longer a threat."

Why take these risks for a picture? Lock, Rose and others in the squadron say if they don't capture these images, people won't fully understand the challenges and sacrifices soldiers face. Lock talked about when a tree falls in a forest. "If we're not out there telling the soldier's story, it's like it never happened."

As conditions in Iraq have grown more chaotic in the past year, their missions have become more dangerous - too dangerous for most mainstream media photographers.

"People always say we're crazy," said Master Sgt. Christopher Nolan, 40, a hard-charging videographer who also received the Bronze Star. He and his buddies sometimes half-joke about their need for adrenaline fixes. He's been deployed to Iraq four times and wants to go again. One day he was in a vehicle that was hit with an explosive. One soldier he was riding with died. "The vehicles I've been in have been blown up three times, I wear two hearing aids, and my knees and back are messed up because of what's happened to me out there," he said, adding that he has the best job in the military.

Sometimes military commanders study the squadron's footage and images to better understand how an operation went.

Capt. John Clagnaz led combat camera teams in Iraq last year and also received a Bronze Star. He said one of the biggest challenges is making sure other branches of the military accept his teams. "Army guys usually aren't used to seeing Air Force guys with them," he said. These military rivalries usually melt once soldiers see that his teams are ready for combat.

Lock, 36, joined the Air Force 15 years ago, thinking he'd do his four years and get out. While stationed in England, he met some combat photographers. "I heard all their stories and how they were traveling around the world and decided I wanted to do that."

Since then, he's done three tours in Afghanistan. He was one of the first military photographers during the initial push into Baghdad. He was named military photographer of the year in 2002 and 2005.

He said his recent tour in Iraq was especially dangerous. "We're pretty much on our own over there, and our job is to find units and see who's got the action. Then we get out there and do it."

One day, he was near a food distribution center when a suicide car bomb exploded about 75 feet away, spraying his Humvee with shrapnel. Lock and other combat camera members captured the aftermath of the car bomb, including soldiers collecting body parts and taking them to a nearby mosque.

On a night patrol with Iraqi and U.S. forces, Lock found himself pinned behind a house as tracers from snipers streaked by. An Iraqi soldier was hit in the neck. Lock helped administer first aid, putting his hands over the bullet wound to stop the bleeding. When the medics arrived, he picked up his camera and continued shooting.

Staff Sgt. James Harper, 27, another Bronze Star recipient, said he was on patrol with an M-1 Abrams tank unit helping an injured Iraqi. Suddenly insurgents attacked, and the tank commander asked Harper to take the machine gun while soldiers tended to the Iraqi. Harper sprayed the insurgents with gunfire. "If I wasn't on that tank, anything could have happened."

Lock and other Bronze Star recipients said they were awed by the Army units they photographed. Lock said the sniper attack Aug. 16 was just the beginning of the patrol's day. After U.S. soldiers beat back the snipers, Lock and Tech Sgt. Jim Schuler photographed soldiers as they searched for insurgents, climbed dark stairways, peeked around corners and steadied themselves in the heat. Later that evening, they photographed the Army unit collaring an insurgent with a secret compartment in his car trunk. Inside were assault rifles and ammunition.

"I only had to do this for four months, but they do it every day," Lock said. "That's why we do this, so what they do is recognized."

View slideshows of images taken in Iraq by Air Force photographers Staff Sgt. Richard Rose and Tech. Sgt. Jeremy Lock. NOTE: Requires Windows Media Player

[Slideshow 1](#) | [Slideshow 2](#) | [Slideshow 3](#) | [Slideshow 4](#)

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## Seven Bronze Stars

Gen. Duncan J. McNabb, commander of the Air Force Air Mobility Command, presented Bronze Stars on Monday to seven members of the 437th Airlift Wing. Before an audience of several hundred service members and their families, McNabb said, "Collectively, you are the heart of this nation."

**Capt. John Clagnaz** led camera teams that documented 935 missions, capturing some of the most graphic combat imagery of the war. Under his leadership, 20 combat cameramen earned Bronze Stars. His teams documented the aftermath of al-Qaida terrorist leader Abu Musab al-Zarqawi's death last June.

**Senior Master Sgt. Lex P. Gibson Jr.** managed security forces in Camp Bucca, Iraq, during which he co-authored an internment voting plan for the Iraqi parliamentary elections. During his tenure, 3,000 internees were handled at the camp without a safety or security breach.

**Staff Sgt. James Harper** was a team leader of a unit that captured some of the most-used photographs on one of the military's Web sites. While on patrol, U.S. forces came under enemy fire. Harper documented the fight and manned a tank gun while soldiers tended to an injured Iraqi.

**Tech. Sgt. Jeremy Lock** documented 92 missions "outside the wire" in northern Iraq last spring, then redeployed last summer near Ramadi. While on patrol, a suicide car bomb exploded in front of him, and a firefight ensued. Lock continued to take photos as U.S. soldiers repelled the attack.

**Master Sgt. Christopher Nolan** oversaw combat camera units that documented 480 combat missions. During one attack, he videotaped operations even as two mortar rounds landed within 100 meters of his vehicle. He documented a battle in July with gunmen firing 75 to 100 meters away.

**Staff Sgt. Richard Wayne Rose Jr.** took more than 4,000 photos in more than 30 air assault missions. Attackers ambushed an explosive ordnance disposal team. Rose provided suppressive fire so the team could get to safety. Footage of the recovery of two kidnapped soldiers' remains will be used as evidence against insurgents.

**Tech. Sgt. Jeffrey D. Wagner** managed a military training team and 220 Iraqi soldiers, repelling attacks against a base. His convoy was ambushed, and he provided suppressing fire to allow an

assault team to pursue the attackers.

## About the medal

Description: A star 1 1/2 inches from point to point. In the center is a raised 3/16-inch bronze star. The reverse has the inscription "Heroic or Meritorious Achievement" and a space for the name of the recipient. A "V" on the ribbon denotes combat service.

### Criteria for the medal:

- a.** The Bronze Star Medal is awarded to any person who, while serving in any capacity in or with the military of the United States after 6 December 1941, distinguished himself or herself by heroic or meritorious achievement or service, not involving participation in aerial flight, while engaged in an action against an enemy of the United States; while engaged in military operations involving conflict with an opposing foreign force; or while serving with friendly foreign forces engaged in an armed conflict against an opposing armed force in which the United States is not a belligerent party.
- b.** Awards may be made for acts of heroism, performed under circumstances described above, which are of lesser degree than required for the award of the Silver Star.
- c.** Awards may be made to recognize single acts of merit or meritorious service. The required achievement or service while of lesser degree than that required for the award of the Legion of Merit must nevertheless have been meritorious and accomplished with distinction.

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