

SORC members narrowly escape from Baghdad with their lives

By Sharon L. Hartman

BAGHDAD, Iraq — Have you ever heard someone say they cheated death? Not too many people can make that statement in the way that Gene Walacavage and SGT Sean Moudy can! Walacavage and Moudy are members of the U.S. Army Space and Missile Defense Command/U.S. Army Forces Strategic Command's Spectral Operations Resource Center (SORC). Both were deployed to Baghdad last year in support of OPERATION IRAQI FREEDOM and both lived through an experience that is nothing short of miraculous.

Just imagine lying peacefully in bed at sunrise and then in an instant hearing a huge incredible blast. Imagine the blast has just blown open a side of your room and you are left injured, dazed and confused. Walacavage and Moudy did not have to imagine this — they experienced it.

During the early morning hours of Oct. 26, 2003, 19 high explosive rockets hit the Al Rasheed Hotel in Baghdad, Iraq, where they were staying, killing one American Soldier and wounding more.

"I was sleeping in my room at the hotel when a rocket propelled grenade smashed through the concrete and metal window frame. It crossed the room, and punched a hole in the wall over my bed before coming to rest in the bathroom," said Walacavage.

"Luckily for me and SGT Moudy, my roommate, the bomb failed to detonate on impact."

However, the force from the kinetic blast of the rocket shot concrete debris into Walacavage's face and upper body.

"My face was burning, and I couldn't breathe at first because of the debris in my mouth," Walacavage added.

"I could not see for the first few seconds and had no idea what was happening until I heard the other rockets impacting on the hotel at which point I rolled onto the floor beside my bed until the explosions stopped.

"I tried to make my way into the bathroom to wash out my eyes but the debris kept me from getting in. I later learned this was a good thing because the unexploded ordinance was lying in the sink. I made my way back toward Sean and shouted to him several times. He answered and said he was 'OK'."

Moudy, who was also injured, found Walacavage amidst the debris, and together they left the room — Moudy leading the blinded Walacavage.

CPT George O'Neil and MAJ Michael Willis, members of SMDC/ARSTRAT's Army Space Support Team 12 who were also staying in the hotel, met them in the hall and brought them into their room where they performed triage on Walacavage until they were able to get a stretcher and carried him down to a waiting ambulance.

As they left the building that lay in a smoking ruin, they realized that they had indeed cheated death.

Walacavage and several of the other injured were transported to the 28th Combat Support Hospital in Baghdad where Walacavage spent about a week until his eyes healed enough for him to be sent to Germany. He spent four days there with an ophthalmologist before continuing his journey home.

Since then, he has had traumatic cataracts removed from each eye. This has cleared his eyesight, but he still needs some dental work because of losing some teeth in the attack.

Walacavage received the Defense of Freedom medal — the civilian equivalent of the military Purple Heart. The award was created following the terrorist attack of Sept. 11, 2001. Moudy received the Purple Heart Medal for the injuries he sustained.

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Clockwise from top right, A rocket propelled grenade entered SORC members Gene Walacavage and Sgt. Sean Moudy's room through this window during an attack on the Al Rasheed Hotel, Oct. 26, 2003; This hallway photo shows the vast damage the RPG did to Walacavage and Moudy's room. Fortunately for the two men, the shell failed to detonate; The RPG penetrated this concrete wall above Walacavage's bed; From inside the bathroom you can see the thickness of the concrete wall the RPG tore through. Photos by

