

young vets in focus



PHOTO COURTESY VICTOR LEWIS

Name: Hospital Corpsman 3rd Class Victor L. Lewis

Age: 40

Unit: Attached to L Co., 3rd Bn., 25th Marines

Military Stats: One tour in Iraq from March to September 2005, earning Bronze Star for Valor

Married: No

“My primary thought was to get to the Marines calling for my help.”

—Hospital Corpsman 3rd Class Victor Lewis

Firefighter Earns Admiration On and Off Battlefield

Navy reservist Victor Lewis put himself in the line of fire to save the lives of two Marines. That same sense of service is evident in his civilian career.

By Janie Blankenship

When Victor Lewis graduated from high school in 1986, he was looking for a challenge so he joined the Marines. He spent four years on active duty and three years in the Marine Corps Reserve.

Always one for an adventure, Lewis became a firefighter with the Cleveland Fire Department in 1996. An EMT, he decided to join the Naval Reserve in 2000.

“I decided that as an EMT, I could always use more training,” said Lewis, who is a Navy corpsman in the Reserve.

In 2004, he learned he would be going with the Marines to Iraq in 2005. Assigned to L Co., 3rd Bn., 25th Marines, Lewis was in Iraq from March to September 2005. Incidentally, the 3rd Bn., 25th Marines, has made the single greatest Corps unit sacrifice in lives so far in Iraq.

Based at Haditha, Lewis’ unit was trying to locate an enemy weapons cache in nearby Haqlaniyah on April 4, 2005, when it was ambushed.

The platoon was hit with heavy machine gun fire, mortars and rocket-propelled grenades. A Marine was wounded, so Lewis ran 40 meters through heavy gunfire to treat him and move him to safety.

Meanwhile, a second Marine was wounded. Again, Lewis made his way through the firefight and literally carried the Marine to safety.

His heroic actions that day saved the lives of those two Marines and also earned him a Bronze Star for valor.

“So many things were going through my mind at the time,” Lewis said. “But my primary thought was to get to the Marines calling for my help.”

The honor is not something Lewis spends much time talking about, but he does keep in touch with the two Marines on occasion. Those serving with Lewis weren’t surprised by his actions.

“He wouldn’t do anything different any other day than he did that day,” Marine Gunnery Sgt. Dan Priestley of the 3/25th told NBC News.

Lewis said he wouldn’t trade his Iraq experience. But when asked about the highlight of his time in the war zone, he laughs.

“For me, taking a shower was definitely a highlight,” he said. “We didn’t get one very often.”

The comparisons between Lewis’ service in Iraq and his work with the fire department are numerous. But saving lives was, and is, the bottom line.

“The main difference in the two is that it’s a lot easier with the fire department,” he said. “And a lot safer.”

Now that he’s back at work at Cleveland’s Station 22, Lewis is busier than ever. He is working on earning a degree in chemical engineering, which requires a lot of math and science courses.

When he’s not working or studying, he volunteers to help adults earn their General Educational Development (GED) credentials and also works with the Cleveland School District to coach children in reading.

“It requires serious time management,” he says. “But reading is important. This is worth it.”

Lewis received a 2006 *American Red Cross Award* and also was honored by the city of Cleveland. And on Nov. 11, 2007, he was featured on NBC News.

“A woman from Arkansas saw me on the news and tracked me down by phone to thank me,” he said. “That really meant a lot to me.”

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Editor’s Note: If you know of any outstanding young veterans of this caliber, please feel free to let us know.