

NEW MEXICO MILITARY INSTITUTE

HALL OF FAME

MSgt Thomas E. Case, USAF 1995 JC (Second Silver Star)

Thomas E. Case attended New Mexico Military Institute from 1993 to 1995 and was active in Bronco athletics as the quarterback of the Bronco football team.

After graduation, he entered the United States Air Force. He is the only airman to receive a Silver Star in both Iraq and Afghanistan. His second Silver Star is from Operation Enduring Freedom (Afghanistan) and the citation reads as follows:

Master Sergeant Thomas Case, United States Air Force, heroically distinguished himself through gallantry as a tactical air control party in Afghanistan for a Classified Special Operations Task Force from 16 July 2009 to 17 July 2009. During one mission Sergeant Case and his platoon conducted a nighttime operation deep into the Khowst-Gardez Pass to capture or kill an enemy combatant and to destroy mountain camps utilized by insurgent forces in the area. Due to weight restrictions on the helicopters used to insert Sergeant Case's platoon, his platoon was inserted approximately 30 minutes after the lead platoon's insertion. With the helicopter landing zone at eight thousand five hundred feet mean sea level, they began an arduous five-kilometer foot movement towards the target area located at eight thousand eight hundred forty-two feet mean sea level. As the platoon maneuvered to the target area, Sergeant Case maintained control of the aircraft supporting this operation. He utilized an AC-130 gunship and manned intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance aircraft to maintain sensor coverage of the target area as well as the infiltration route. After moving nearly one thousand feet up mountainous terrain, Sergeant Case realized they were off their planned route and notified his ground force commander to get the assault force moving in the right direction. At that time the platoon came into decisive contact with an enemy machine gun position approximately fifteen meters away and perched above them in the high ground. Pinned down in the center of the platoon's formation, Sergeant Case recognized they needed to employ close air support. With machine gun rounds impacting the ground and trees within two feet of him, Sergeant Case remained exposed to enemy fire so he could locate the enemy position. Unfortunately, the wires on his radio were seriously damaged making it nearly impossible for him to communicate with their supporting aircraft. After identifying and troubleshooting the problem, Sergeant Case was able to hold the wires together and request immediate close air support from the gunship. With the gunship in an offset orbit for noise mitigation and needing approximately two minutes to reposition in order to support, Sergeant Case requested an intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance update from the aircraft supporting overhead. After he was told the enemy was approximately fifteen meters away, Sergeant Case stood up while under enemy fire to take charge of five support personnel attached to the platoon. With enemy gunfire continuing to impact within feet of his position and whizzing by his head, he laid down suppressive fire with his M4 rifle and expertly directed the five enablers to move behind cover. Afterward, Sergeant Case briefed his close air support plan to the ground force commander and then employed his damaged radio to call for danger close AC-130 engagement on the enemy position. Due to the extremely close proximity of friendly forces to the enemy, and with bullets still hitting within feet of his position, he again willingly stood up while under fire to make sure the rounds from the AC-130 hit the correct target area. After the second dangerous close mission Sergeant Case saw two enemy fighters, armed with AK-47s, bounding down the hill and shooting at him and the ground force commander. As they closed within fifteen meters of their position, Sergeant Case literally placed himself between the enemy personnel and the ground force commander in order to protect him from their gunfire. Employing his M-4 rifle and directing the ground force commander to take cover, he then killed both insurgents, both of whom turned out to be highly trained foreign fighters. As the fighting continued, the enemy repositioned to even higher terrain and began to throw hand grenades down the mountain slope. One grenade exploded approximately ten meters from his position, damaging his helmet and wounding two rangers. After directing six more dangerous close engagements, Sergeant Case realized that he needed to link up with the lead element in order to have his eyes on the entrenched enemy position and to continue pushing the enemy back. With the dust and haze from the airstrikes bring visibility to near zero, he climbed fifty meters up a sixty-degree embankment to reach the fire team leader, all while under enemy fire. Once there, he rendezvoused with the lead fire team, quickly fixed his radio, and directed four AC-130 airstrikes on three enemy personnel that were approximately one hundred meters away. Shortly afterward, he and the lead element engaged two enemy personnel who flanked their position within seven meters. With the enemy located in the trees, Sergeant Case threw a grenade into their position and then followed up with his M-4 rifle to assure both insurgents were dead. By his gallantry and devotion to duty, Sergeant Case has reflected great credit upon himself and the United States Air Force.

Thomas E. Case's performance of duty in combat is in keeping with the New Mexico Military Institute credo of Duty, Honor, and Achievement.

Inducted for Valor this 22nd day of October in the year 2021

LTC Danny L. Armijo, NMMI 1972 JC
NMMI Alumni Relations Director

Jerry W. Grizzle, Ph.D.
Major General, USA (Ret)
NMMI Superintendent/President