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# Pentagon Honors Medics Killed in Wars

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WASHINGTON --

Combat medic Christopher Holland was shot to death in Iraq while tending the wounds of another soldier. Paul Nakamura was killed when his ambulance was hit by a rocket-propelled grenade.

At least 220 medics, Navy corpsmen and other medical personnel have been killed in the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan.

"They're my heroes," says the Pentagon's top doctor, S. Ward Casscells, who has co-authored a book on them and meets Wednesday with some of their families in hopes of getting support to build a memorial to their sacrifices.

Since the 2001 start of the war in Afghanistan, military medical workers have died in plane crashes, were ambushed on patrols, succumbed in traffic accidents, were killed by friendly fire and died by dozens of other means.

Nakamura, with a rank of specialist in the Army Reserve, was born in Santa Fe Springs, Calif., and died in Iskandariya, south of Baghdad, in 2003. Holland, a 26-year-old soldier also with the rank of specialist, was born in Brunswick, Ga., in 1977 and died in Baghdad the same year as he worked on his platoon leader after an ambush.

Navy Hospital Corpsman Marc A. Retmier died in a Taliban attack in Afghanistan in June while working with a reconstruction team, treating local civilians, the book says.

Mostly a collection of short biographies on the fallen, it's titled, "When It Mattered Most."

"When it mattered the most, they answered the call," Casscells (pronounced kah-sells) said in an interview.

"The call" is the scream of "Corpsman up!" or "Medic!" that comes across the battlefield when a soldier, sailor, airman or Marine is injured.

Soldiers refer to their medic or corpsman as "Doc," but the medical workers call themselves "force multipliers." That is, the very idea that there is someone nearby to render aid - or save lives - emboldens troops to take more risks.

Roughly one soldier dies out of every eight wounded in battle today, compared with a mortality rate of one for every 2.4 in World War II and one for every three in Vietnam, the Army has said. Officials attribute the higher survival rate to better armor and tactics, better and faster medical treatment at the front and other advances.

Medics also can be commanders' eyes and ears for other issues - perhaps more likely to notice when someone in the unit is having emotional problems or not eating well.

But the burden can be great, not just in mortality but in high rates of post-traumatic stress disorder, Casscells said.

Doctors, nurses and other medical personnel have borne the strain of what they've seen in the two wars, where burns, amputations and blast wounds from roadside bombs have shattered so many bodies. "But by far, the people bearing the brunt on the medical side have been the medics and corpsmen," because they are on the front line with their units, he said.

They carry defensive weapons and go where their company or platoon goes - searching out insurgents, raiding homes, manning checkpoints and so on.

The history of Iraq and Afghanistan is filled with stories of those who dared to run to the wounded in the middle of a firefight, or kept applying bandages, checking pulses and lifting troops to safety when they themselves were wounded. A number have received the Silver Star and other decorations.

"They're not supposed to be dashing through a hail of bullets," Casscells said, but that unspoken standard set by some weighs on their minds.

They "beat themselves up" when they've made a mistake or simply think they've let a comrade down, but "the chance to do good is also high ... so you can imagine the emotional roller coaster" they are often on, Casscells said.

Patrick Campbell, a combat medic who was attached to an infantry patrol unit in Iraq, said he's an example.

"No matter what I felt about whether or not we should be in Iraq, I felt like I was saving people's lives," said Campbell, now with the Iraq and Afghanistan Veterans of America.

"That was constant reassurance to me," he said, adding that his "defining moment" in Iraq was in August 2005, when he helped save an ambushed Iraqi police officer who'd been shot 12 times.

On the other hand, he also vividly remembers a soldier who died of a head wound on his watch.

"My PTSD moment," he said, "is that thought rolling around in my head: What could I have done differently to save that person's life?"

