

Someone You Should Know

FORT HOOD GRANDMOTHER OF FOUR EARNS PURPLE HEART

by Gloria Montgomery, Warrior Transition Brigade Public Affairs, Fort Hood, TX

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TO 5-YEAR-OLD Payton, the purple ribbon medallion he cradled in his hand was “pretty neat.” Though too young to understand the sacrifices behind the heart-shaped medal, he does know that it belongs to a soldier: his grandmother, the Warrior Transition Brigade’s **Sgt. Trecia Rodgers**. “Oh, he’s always wearing my hat and walking around the house in my boots,” said the 46-year-old grandmother of four who was wounded May 6, 2012, when an enemy’s rocket exploded just six feet from her bunk in the tent she shared with seven others at Forward Operation Base Shank, Afghanistan. Thankfully, timing and an empty bunk averted what most likely would have been a casualty.

“The soldier whose bunk took the direct hit was on duty,” Rodgers said. She received the Purple Heart in a ceremony Sept. 20, accompanied by her husband of 30 years.

Presenting the Purple Heart Medal to Rodgers was her battalion commander, Lt. Col. Christopher Cook.

“This is an honor for me,” Cook said. It was his first Purple Heart presentation.

Rodgers said she doesn’t remember much about the morning of May 6 other than the deafening boom and the whirlwind of flying debris. She blacked out after that. Mobile, but sore and bruised with shrapnel and burn wounds, the 82nd Airborne Division soldier also had suffered a concussion that was identified only after her speech became a mouthful of indistinguishable chatter. “I really thought I was OK,” said the airframes mechanic. Rodgers praised the doctors at the traumatic brain injury field clinic in Afghanistan, who diagnosed additional issues resulting in a medical flight home.

“It was the age factor,” she said. “At 45, you just don’t recover as quickly as when you were 21.” Initially assigned to Fort Rucker, Rodgers transferred to Fort Hood’s transition brigade in November 2012 to be near her terminally ill mother.

While she was training alongside “baby-faced” kids old



LTC Christopher Cook presents the Purple Heart Medal to SGT Trecia Rodgers

enough to be her children, Rodgers’ son was leaving for Iraq with the National Guard and her husband was home in Idaho. Although he knew his wife wouldn’t deploy immediately, the thought still was troubling. “She’s the love of my life,” said Don Rodgers. “But I am proud of her.” By the time Trecia Rodgers left for Afghanistan in 2011, her son had returned safely from Iraq and was out of the Guard.

Admitting her mom is pretty headstrong, the Rodgers’ daughter, Stefanie, said she knew better than to question her mom why she made the career plunge. “It does seem to fit her,” said Stefanie, who, along with her three children, lives with her parents in Killeen. “She had always wanted to join, and she was going to do what she wanted to do regardless of what I thought.” Trecia’s daughter beams with pride at her mother’s accomplishments. “Things could have ended up so differently,” said Stefanie, acknowledging the change in her mother since her return from war. “I’m just grateful she made it back alive.”

Trecia Rodgers said she hopes to one day be fit for duty. No matter how many bumps and hills are ahead of her, Rodgers said being grandmother to her four grandsons, with a fifth one on the way, is what she enjoys best about life. And, she said, the Purple Heart reminds her of how close she came to not coming home.

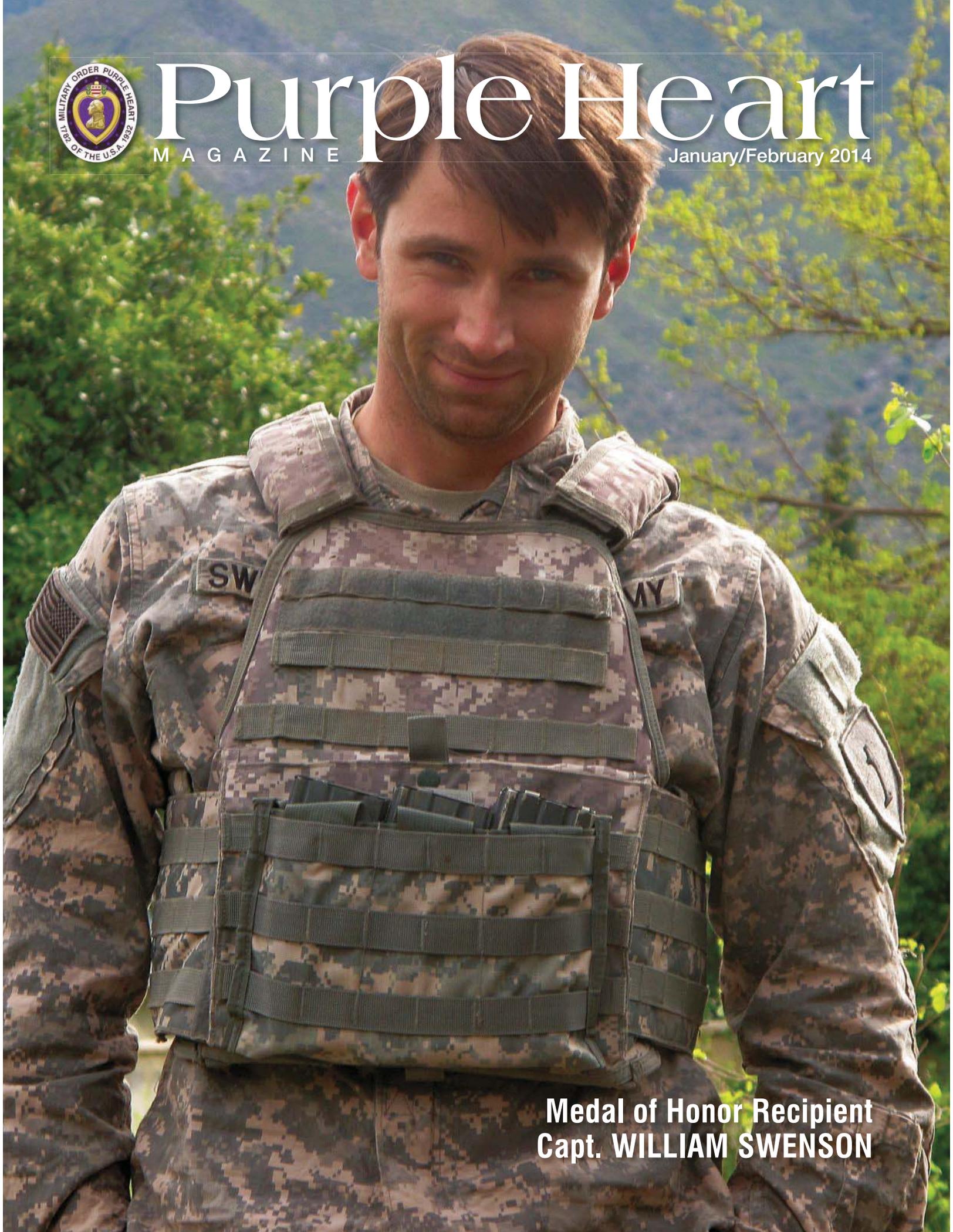
“It is a mixed emotion, really,” she said. “It’s both a reminder of what happened, as well as a reminder of what might not have been.” ✧



Purple Heart

M A G A Z I N E

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**Medal of Honor Recipient
Capt. WILLIAM SWENSON**