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OTTAWA – A Canadian soldier who died in Lebanon last year is one of three soldiers who is going to receive a decoration for service to his country.

Major Paeta Derek Hess–von Kruedener, from Kingston, Ontario is being awarded the Meritorious Service Cross posthumously.

The Princess Patricia Canadian Light Infantry officer was killed by an Israeli bomb on July 25th, 2006 while serving at a United Nations observation post in southern Lebanon.

Lieutenant–Colonel Omer Henry Lavoie, from Petawawa, who commanded the 1st Battalion, Royal Canadian Regiment Battle Group, in southern Afghanistan, is also being awarded a Meritorious Service Cross, for his role in two complex operations, including Operation MEDUSA.

Warrant Officer Michael Bradley Smith, from Calgary, will receive a Meritorious Service Medal for leadership as a tactics and weapons maintenance instructor in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia last year.

Governor General Michaëlle Jean says the Meritorious Service Decorations go to individuals whose specific achievements have brought honour to the Canadian Forces and to Canada.

(BN)

Governor General Announces Three Meritorious Service Decorations

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Soldiers honoured

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A Princess Patricia Canadian Light Infantry officer who died in Lebanon last year is being awarded the Meritorious Service Cross posthumously. Maj. Paeta Derek Hess-von Kruedener, from Kingston, was killed by an Israeli bomb on July 25, 2006 while serving at a UN observation post in southern Lebanon.

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Medusa commander merits service cross; Medal recognizes front-line leadership

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OTTAWA – Under the unforgiving desert sun, in 55 C heat, Lt.-Col. Omer Henry Lavoie led his troops into battle against the Taliban.

A gouge on the barrel of the machine gun of his light-armored vehicle — centimetres away from his head — bore testimony to his philosophy of leadership.

"My perspective is that you have to lead from the front so you understand what your soldiers are going through," he said several months later.

Governor General Michaëlle Jean Monday announced that Lavoie, 41, who led NATO's largest ground offensive in Afghanistan, was awarded the Meritorious Service Cross.

For seven months beginning August 2006, Lavoie commanded the 1st Battalion, Royal Canadian Regiment Battle Group, in southern Afghanistan. Within days of taking command, he led Operation Medusa, NATO's first offensive ground operation at the Battle Group level.

At the height of the the operation, 1,400 troops moved under his command.

He immersed himself in the battles, sitting in the crew commander's seat of his light-armoured vehicle as bullets whistled around his convoy.

"I don't know how many times, close to half a dozen times or so, we were ambushed or engaged with some sort of direct fire weapon," he said.

His convoy constantly encountered improvised explosive devices — IEDs, and on Nov. 27 it led to personal tragedy.

Lavoie was leading his four-vehicle combat patrol. Half an hour after leaving Kandahar Airfield, a suicide bomber detonated an explosive, killing the driver in the vehicle behind Lavoie and Chief Warrant Officer Robert Girouard.

Girouard and Lavoie had been together for almost 18 months during training and combat. But they were more than colleagues. In August, Lavoie will walk Girouard's daughter down the aisle at her wedding.

"That was certainly probably the most trying day, given that he's my right hand man, a very close friend," But it also strengthened his resolve to win the war, Lavoie said.

Ottawa Citizen

Soldier earns medal for leading by example; A Stittsville native is being honoured for his actions in Afghanistan, where he commanded his troops from the front lines, reports William Lin.

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ILLUSTRATION: Colour Photo: Photo courtesy of Lt.-Col. Omer Henry Lavoie /Lt.-Col. Omer Henry Lavoie will receive the Meritorious Service Cross from Gov. Gen. Michaëlle Jean for his role in Operation Medusa. ;
BYLINE: William Lin
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In the Afghanistan battle that Gov. Gen. Michaëlle Jean's office is calling "the most significant ground combat operation in NATO's history," it was Lt.-Col. Omer Henry Lavoie of Stittsville who led the troops.

And he didn't command from afar. Out in the 55-degree heat, he was on the front lines — and his machine-gun on his light-armoured vehicle proved it, with a gouge on the barrel from flying shrapnel only centimetres away from his head.

Other times, he was metres away from an exploding suicide bomber.

"My perspective is that you have to lead from the front so you understand what your soldiers are going through," he said yesterday. "And you have to share the same risks and hardships as the soldiers."

Yesterday, the Governor General announced she will award Lt.-Col. Lavoie, 41, with the Meritorious Service Cross.

For seven months beginning in August 2006, he commanded the 1st Battalion, Royal Canadian Regiment Battle Group, in southern Afghanistan. Within days of taking command, he led Operation Medusa, NATO's first offensive ground operation at the Battle Group level.

At the height of the the operation, 1,400 troops moved under his command. But, he also immersed himself in battles, sitting in the crew commander's seat of his light-armoured vehicle as bullets whistled around his convoy.

"The way it works is, yeah, I'm the commanding officer, the senior man on the ground. But at the same time, I was a soldier first," Lt.-Col. Lavoie said.

"I don't know how many times, close to half a dozen times or so, we were ambushed or engaged with some sort of direct fire weapon," from machine-gun to 82-millimetre recoilless weapon fire, he said.

Soldier earns medal for leading by example; A Stittsville native is being honoured for his actions in Afghanistan

His convoy constantly encountered improvised explosive devices, or IEDs, and on Nov. 27 it led to tragedy.

Lt.-Col Lavoie was leading his four-vehicle combat patrol as they tried to link up with forward troops. Half an hour after leaving Kandahar Airfield, a suicide bomber detonated an explosive, killing the driver in the vehicle behind Lt.-Col. Lavoie.

It also killed his regimental sergeant-major, Chief Warrant Officer Robert Girouard.

They had been together for almost 18 months during training and combat, he said, but they were more than just colleagues.

In August, Lt.-Col. Lavoie will walk Chief Warrant Officer Girouard's daughter down the aisle.

"That was ... probably the most trying day given that he's my right-hand man, a very close friend, families are very close," he said. "So to have him killed ... that was a difficult blow for me and my battle group."

But it also strengthened his resolve to win the war, he said.

"I promised his family that we would keep the fight against the enemy because that's what he would have wanted us to have done," he said.

His battle group's efforts forced the Taliban militants away from certain swaths of land, allowing villagers to return to their homes, he said.

Lt.-Col. Lavoie said he credits several hundred others for the honour: soldiers who served under him.

"They're the ones that deserve the recognition and award and they're the guys who, through both achievement and sacrifice, led to the success of the mission over there," he said.

He added that just three hours after he took his command in Afghanistan, hundreds of Taliban militants attacked one of their positions. They were outnumbered around five-to-one.

In the end, about 100 militants were killed, he estimated, while no one on the Canadian side died that day.

Born in the northern Ontario town of Marathon, he always loved the outdoors and at 10 years old, knew he wanted to do something military related, he said.

Lt.-Col. Lavoie was a rifle platoon commander during the Oka Crisis, a company second-in-command in Croatia and Bosnia and served as a battle group operations officer in Kosovo.

The Governor General also announced yesterday that Maj. Paeta Hess-von Kruedener would be given the Meritorious Service Decoration.

Maj. Hess-von Kruedener, a 44-year-old London, Ont., native, was given the award posthumously. He was killed last July in Lebanon when Israeli forces struck a UN observation post.

The award's citation said he "steadfastly maintained his position while reporting the situation as it presented itself."

His wife, Cynthia Hess-von Kruedener, said he had always wanted to serve at that post. And that day, he honoured Canada by continuing to do his duty, she said.

Soldier earns medal for leading by example; A Stittsville native is being honoured for his actions in Afghanistan

"He stayed at that post knowing that they were unable to get him out," she said.