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LEROY PETRY GREW UP IN SANTA FE, NEW MEXICO, in a home where the walls were decorated with photos of the men of his family in their uniforms – both grandfathers, an uncle, a cousin. There was not much discussion about what these men had done, just an assumption that service was an honorable life path.

After a year in college, Petry, then twenty years old, decided to enlist in the 75th Ranger Regiment late in 1999. He had always been interested in this elite branch of the Army because of its slogan: Rangers Lead the Way.

On May 26, 2008, Petry, then a staff sergeant, was in the middle of his second tour in Afghanistan when his platoon was helicoptered to a remote area in Paktia to attempt to capture a high-value target thought to be staying in a walled compound. Petry knew that the daylight raid might involve a tough firefight because enemy targets were usually protected by well-armed, battle-hardened security teams.

Almost immediately after infiltrating the objective, the Rangers came under heavy fire. Petry was moving forward with his platoon leader when he saw a squad entering one of the secondary buildings at the compound. Because the squad leader was inexperienced, Petry decided to help. After clearing the building, he saw a small building in the courtyard and headed toward it with another Ranger to make sure hostile forces were not hiding there. Enemy fighters immediately emerged from hiding at the end of the courtyard and opened fire. Petry was struck by a round, which went through both his legs. The other Ranger was hit in the left side, saved from certain death by the ceramic plate of his body armor.

Petry tossed a grenade at the enemy. Another Ranger ran through the courtyard to support them. They were sprayed with shrapnel by an answering grenade from the insurgents. A second grenade landed even closer to the three Rangers. Petry picked it up to throw it back, but it exploded as it left his hand. A pink mist of blood clouded his protective glasses. When he took them off he saw that his right hand had been cleanly severed at the wrist.

LEROY A. PETRY

SERGEANT FIRST CLASS, U.S. ARMY
Company D, 2nd Battalion, 75th Ranger Regiment

BORN

July 29, 1979
Santa Fe, New Mexico

ENTERED SERVICE

Santa Fe, New Mexico

BRANCH

U.S. Army

DUTY

War in Afghanistan





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Petry applied a tourniquet from his pack and then got on the radio to report that three Rangers were down. As an afterthought, he added, “And I also lost one of my hands.”

Approximately a half hour later, Petry, who had refused to be evacuated until the enemy was taken out, was moved to a casualty collection area, where combat medics worked on his legs as well as his arm. One of the Rangers who had fought with him in the courtyard came by to tell him, “You saved us, brother.”

During his nine months of care and rehabilitation at Brooke Army Medical Center in San Antonio, Petry was fitted with a state-of-the-art prosthetic arm and hand. He immediately had a small plaque listing the names of the fallen Rangers in his battalion welded onto it.

Petry was scheduled to leave the Army at the end of 2009, but the day before he was to be separated he decided to reenlist to work with wounded, ill, or injured U.S. Special Operations Forces service members and their families. He deployed to Afghanistan in February 2011. Three months later, he received a phone call from the President of the United States informing him of his nomination for the Medal of Honor.

Sergeant First Class Leroy Petry was awarded the medal by President Barack Obama on July 12, 2011. As the President signed his citation, Petry, noticing that the President was left-handed, bent over and whispered, “Mr. President, now I’m left-handed too. Any tips on how I can keep from smudging my handwriting?”