

SERGEANT MICHAEL CESSNA

715th MI Battalion, 500th MI Brigade

CSM Doug Russell Award 2010 Recipient



A graduate of Waynesville, Ohio High School, Michael Cessna majored in English Literature with a minor in Italian at Ohio State University. In his final year of school, he studied Italian Language and the Italian political system at the University of Urbino, Italy. Graduating in 2000, he worked as a reporter and writer in Columbus, Ohio and as a travel advisor for STA Travel in the company's branch offices in Los Angeles, Glasgow, and Columbus. He joined the Army as a 35P Cryptologic Linguist in 2003. Following Basic Training, he completed the Basic Korean Language Course at the Defense Language Institute (DLI) and then attended Advanced Individual Training at Goodfellow Air Force Base, Texas.

SGT Cessna's first assignment was with Delta Troop, 2/14 Cavalry Squadron as part of a Signals Intelligence (SIGINT) platoon integrated with a Reconnaissance, Surveillance, and Target Acquisition (RSTA) squadron at Schofield Barracks, Hawaii. In March 2006, SGT Cessna completed the GISA 2000 SIGINT Course at Fort Meade, Maryland, and was selected by his chain of command to perform tactical SIGINT overwatch at Fort Lewis, Washington, learning the latest tactics, techniques, and procedures (TTPs) of the forward-deployed 4th Brigade, 2nd Infantry Division (ID).

SGT Cessna deployed as lead reporter with 2nd Brigade, 25th ID's SIGINT Platoon to Iraq from December 2007 to February 2009. As a direct result of his efforts, the platoon was awarded the coveted National Security Agency (NSA) Director's Cup for the best tactical SIGINT unit in the Army for 2008 for its consistent excellence in providing timely and accurate actionable SIGINT to the brigade in support of counterinsurgency (COIN) operations northwest of Baghdad. During his time in theater, SGT Cessna wrote more than 350 tactical reports and assisted in time-sensitive targeting operations which resulted in the detainment of 53 individuals, including major battalion, Joint Special Operations Task Force, and Multi-National Division Baghdad high-value individuals. As a result of SGT Cessna's thorough analysis and reporting, 2/25 SIGINT Platoon

became renowned for having some of the most successful organic SIGINT Terminal Guidance (STG) teams in theater.

In June 2008, 2/25 was called on to support a mission that resulted in the capture of two insurgents responsible for a suicide vest attack that killed two Coalition Force personnel and several key senior tribal leaders during a high-level meeting near Fallujah. The successful operation earned the STG team and 2/25 SIGINT platoon praise from General Petraeus. Throughout 2008, insurgent activity targeting Coalition and Iraqi forces dropped 51 percent in 2/25's Operational Environment as a direct result of SGT Cessna's analytical efforts. Areas that were once considered hot spots were secured.

Enabling the brigade to conduct precision lethal targeting operations was the most significant impact of SGT Cessna's work with the SIGINT platoon. He was instrumental in developing targets based on multi-source intelligence reporting and link analysis, and worked to acquire positive identification to facilitate targeting. This allowed the brigade to maintain an active targeting posture through the entire deployment, even after the implementation of warrant-based targeting mandated by the Security Agreement in late 2008. This not only helped the brigade remove threats from the battlefield, but improved relations with Iraqi Security Forces, as the warrants they issued were quickly executed.

Through the aggressive development of innovative TTPs, collaboration with numerous Soldiers in other intelligence disciplines, and the cultivation of mutual-trust-based networks with SIGINT professionals of external organizations at all echelons, SGT Cessna became more than merely a brigade single-source intelligence analyst. The trust and credibility that he built with other agencies from Army brigades to National Intelligence levels provided not only a more robust capability to support COIN operations northwest of Baghdad, but also enhanced the mission success of multiple Coalition Force units and organizations operating throughout the theater.