



When Pfc. Daniel Windham was finally awarded the Purple Heart for injuries he received while on duty in Iraq in 2006, he said he was both grateful and relieved.

But he also said it was a little disappointing.

“It was kinda like having to buy and wrap my own Christmas present,” Windham said in a recent phone interview.

Windham, who was an active-duty Army soldier, said after returning from Iraq, he battled a complicated system of military bureaucracy and finger-pointing in order to receive the award he knew he deserved.

Windham was assigned to the 501st Military Police Company, and while stationed in Ramadi, a city in central Iraq approximately 68 miles west of Baghdad, the Colorado native and his unit came under attack on Aug. 21, 2006. A dump truck filled with explosives and fuel canisters approached the front gate of the Iraqi police station where he worked, and detonated.

Although Windham sustained head wounds, he was still able to provide aid to the wounded Iraqi police officers and civilians around him.

Treated for his own injuries on site, and then transported to Germany, Windham eventually returned to the United States, where he completed his tour of duty and left the service in 2009.

But during the three years between his wartime injury and his departure from the Army,

Windham said his sacrifice was never formally acknowledged.

To receive the Purple Heart, Army regulations require that a soldier be injured by enemy action and receive documented treatment from a medical officer.

Windham knew he was eligible.

He had the scars and the documentation to prove it.

Although Windham said he was told paperwork for his award was submitted, he said he was also told the award had been denied.

Frustrated, he asked his chain of command to resubmit the award package.

“I’m pretty sure it wasn’t,” he said. “I think they just told me that to get rid of me.”

Meanwhile, Windham sat silently as others in his unit were recognized for their actions in combat, and for the same incident.

“It made me mad.”

But in early 2012, a phone call from Windham’s uncle in Grand Junction would put the 26-year-old Metro State College student in touch with another veteran of the Iraq war, U.S. Rep. Mike Coffman.

Within a month of Coffman’s filing a formal congressional query into the status of his award, the

Department of Defense asked for the paperwork and medical records related to the incident.

Windham obliged, and the award was approved.

On June 11 in his Centennial office, Coffman presented Windham with his long-awaited Purple Heart.

“Daniel represents the courage and selfless devotion to duty that is reflective of the best traditions of our military,” said Coffman. “I served in Iraq during much of the same period that Daniel was deployed there and it is a great honor to present this award to a fellow combat veteran.”

While Windham says “screw-ups” like this happen all too often, he’s grateful for Coffman’s help in bringing resolution to the matter.

“It’s just disappointing I didn’t get to share this moment with those I served with.”

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[Centennial Citizen](#)
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