

JL Spears
authorjlspears@gmail.com
<https://www.jlspears.com>
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DAEMON PROTOCOL EXTRAS – ANA’S STORY
by
JL Spears

Ana’s boots crunched against the gravel road as she walked to her assigned barracks at Fort Drum. The winter air of upstate New York stung her cheeks, a stark contrast to the humid summers she had known growing up in the Midwest. It was her first duty station as a combat medic, and despite the icy wind that cut through her jacket, she carried a quiet determination. This was her chance to build a life beyond the small town and modest upbringing she had known.

Graduating high school had felt more like an ending than a beginning for Ana. Her family couldn’t afford college, and opportunities were scarce in their struggling rural community. She had always believed education was her way out, but with no means to pursue it, she decided the Army would be her path forward. When she enlisted as a medical specialist, she imagined herself working in a hospital, assisting with routine care. Instead, she was trained as a combat medic, prepared to treat injuries on the battlefield. The reality of her role didn’t sink in until she received orders to deploy to Afghanistan with the 10th Mountain Division.

The journey to Afghanistan was surreal. As the plane descended over the barren, rugged landscape, Ana stared out the window, trying to process what lay ahead. The base was a hive of

activity, with soldiers moving purposefully among armored vehicles and tents. The air was thick with dust, and the sun beat down relentlessly. Ana was assigned to 2nd Battalion, 21st Infantry, where she quickly learned that life in a war zone was as unpredictable as it was unforgiving.

In her first tour of duty during Operation Enduring Freedom, Ana quickly learned the stakes of her work. The days were long, hot, and often marked by moments of chaos. She treated everything from dehydration to battlefield wounds, her medical training tested in ways she hadn't imagined. She remembered vividly her first experience with combat injuries—a young private with shrapnel wounds from an IED explosion. Her hands had trembled as she worked to stop the bleeding, but she pushed through the fear, focusing on the task at hand. By the time she began her second deployment, she was experienced and confident in her abilities. However, it was during this second tour that Ana's life took a turn she would carry with her forever.

Near their base, a sprawling refugee camp housed Afghan women and children displaced by the ongoing conflict. The camp was a patchwork of makeshift shelters and dirt pathways, the air filled with the mingling scents of cooking fires and unwashed bodies. Ana had taken to visiting the camp whenever she could, often under the pretense of checking on the sick or delivering medical supplies. In truth, she felt drawn to the women there, many of whom had suffered unimaginable losses. These visits gave her a sense of purpose that transcended her military duties.

Ana grew close to a group of women who ran a small medical tent in the camp. Despite having no formal training, they worked tirelessly to provide basic care, assisting with childbirth and tending to minor injuries. Ana spent hours teaching them emergency medical techniques, sharing what she could to help them cope with the endless stream of need. She admired their

resilience and courage, even in the face of unimaginable hardship. The bond she formed with these women was a bright spot in a bleak environment, but it was also a source of constant heartache. She saw the toll the war had taken on their lives and felt an unshakable guilt for the role her presence, as a U.S. soldier, played in their suffering.

One fateful day, just weeks before her deployment was set to end, the camp came under attack. Insurgents had targeted it, viewing it as a symbol of foreign influence. Ana was at her unit's observation post when the first explosions sounded, the sharp cracks of gunfire echoing across the valley. Her heart sank as she realized the camp was under siege.

"Medic! Get ready to move!" her squad leader shouted, snapping Ana out of her shock.

The soldiers at the post scrambled to mount a defense, returning fire as the insurgents advanced. Ana's hands shook as she prepared her aid bag, waiting for the all-clear to move toward the camp. Minutes felt like hours as the battle raged, the cries of the wounded mingling with the cacophony of gunfire. When the insurgents were finally driven back, Ana sprinted toward the camp, her legs carrying her as fast as they could manage.

The scene that greeted her was one of devastation. Shelters had been reduced to smoldering ruins, and the medical tent was in shambles. Bodies lay scattered across the ground, some lifeless, others writhing in pain. Ana's training took over as she knelt beside the first casualty she saw, a young boy with shrapnel wounds peppering his chest. She worked quickly, staunching the bleeding and administering pain relief before moving on to the next patient.

The women she had trained were among the wounded, their faces etched with pain and fear. One of them, a mother of four named Farah, had been struck in the leg by a piece of

shrapnel. Despite her injury, she had continued to assist others until she collapsed from blood loss. Ana's throat tightened as she treated her friend, a mix of anger and grief threatening to overwhelm her. Supplies were scarce, many of them destroyed or looted during the attack, forcing Ana to improvise as she worked. She tore strips of cloth from her own uniform to create makeshift bandages, using every ounce of her training and resourcefulness to save lives.

As night fell, reinforcements arrived from the battalion aid station, bringing additional medics and supplies. Together, they worked tirelessly, treating burns, amputations, and countless other injuries. The hours blurred together in a haze of blood and exhaustion, Ana's body running on sheer willpower. She found herself mentoring younger medics who looked to her for guidance, her experience and calm under pressure an anchor in the chaos.

By dawn, the immediate crisis had passed, but the toll was staggering. Many had died, and those who survived faced a long road to recovery. Ana's hands were raw from constant work, her uniform stained with blood and dirt. When the last patient was stabilized, Ana's strength finally gave out. She collapsed onto the ground, her vision swimming as dehydration and heat exhaustion overtook her. Fellow medics carried her to the aid station, where she received IV fluids and rest. Despite her own condition, Ana's thoughts remained with the women and children she had fought to save. The weight of their suffering bore down on her, a constant reminder of the senseless brutality of war.

For her actions that day, Ana was awarded the Meritorious Service Medal. The recognition was bittersweet, a stark contrast to the memories that haunted her. The faces of the refugees, the cries of the wounded, and the smell of blood and smoke lingered in her mind long

after she returned home. She often revisited the memories of Farah and the other women who had become her friends, their strength and resilience etched deeply into her heart.

Years later, Ana would change careers but her heart was never far from what she had felt that day. Whenever possible, she would look for ways to help others. She often volunteered in underserved communities, channeling her experiences in Afghanistan into a drive to make a difference. Yet, the events of that day in the refugee camp remained with her, a reminder of both the resilience of the human spirit and the devastating cost of conflict. She carried the memory of Farah and the other women with her, honoring their strength and courage by continuing to fight for a better world, one patient at a time.

The End