

## Area Lawyer Gets Purple Heart

Lt. Col. Mathew Tully told friends he doesn't remember much about the powerful blast that ripped through his camp in Afghanistan last month.

One minute, the 38-year-old guardsman and attorney from Niskayuna was standing. And the next, he was in the middle of chaos.

"The next thing he knew he was on the ground," relayed Greg Rinckey, his partner at the Colonie-based law firm Tully Rinckey.

Tully was apparently standing in the vicinity of a pickup truck that was detonated by a suicide bomber at the gate to a NATO military base south of the Afghan capital of Kabul on Aug. 7. The explosion injured 17 civilians and three soldiers at the base, local authorities later told the Associated Press.

Among them was Tully. Rinckey wasn't sure of the extent of his injuries but said they were enough to earn Tully a Purple Heart.

Rinckey said the two partners talked a short time after the blast. But instead of discussing his personal experience, Tully steered the conversation to how his fellow soldiers were coping with the bombing.

"He was more just talking about what happened with his troops," he said Thursday.

Reports indicate the suicide attacker tucked explosives beneath a load of gravel in the bed of the truck and was able to get past an outer gate of the base in Pul-i-Alam, the capital of the Logar Province. The truck apparently belonged to a local contractor and was detonated after it slammed into another vehicle at a second gate, the Associated Press reported last month.

A Taliban spokesman later released a statement indicating the attack was launched by insurgents and claimed it had killed several foreign troops. The casualties were never verified, according to The Associated Press.

The blast that injured Tully was among a series of violent and sometimes lethal insurgent attacks that occurred in the war-torn nation throughout August, including two that killed New Yorkers. On Aug. 8, Army Maj. Thomas Kennedy of West Point died when an insurgent detonated a suicide vest in the Kunar Province; two days later, Marine Lance Cpl. Gregory Buckley died while supporting combat operations in Helmand Province.

Rinckey said he anxiously watches for reports about the escalating violence overseas. News of a bombing or combat casualties always deepens his feelings of concern, since he's never sure where Tully is deployed.

"You never know," he said. "Every time you hear about these attacks, obviously it's scary knowing that your partner is deployed in a combat zone."

Attempts to reach Tully, who remains in Afghanistan, and his wife, Kim, were unsuccessful Thursday. An auto-response from his email at the law firm alerts of his return in June 2013.

“Assuming I make it out of war alive, I will see you when I return,” he states in the reply.

Tully is among more than 7,300 soldiers who have received the Purple Heart as a result of operations in Afghanistan. Some were awarded the honor posthumously.

Tully deployed with the New York Army National Guard last winter and is attached to the 42nd Infantry Division. He has since traveled throughout Afghanistan helping to train the Afghan National Police.

Rinckey said the year-long deployment has brought his friend and business partner to remote areas of the country. He said his conversations with Tully are often limited and garbled due to some of the remote locations where he is sent throughout the country.

But the deployment is one Tully embraced with zeal, Rinckey recalls. He’s been deployed to a combat zone twice and to the Middle East three times since 2001.

Rinckey said his partner sometimes talks about leaving the service. But usually this sort of talk is fleeting.

“After the last deployment he told me he was going to get out,” he recalled. “But he loves it. He enjoys serving his country.”