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With fond memories of his mentor, Jodha back in Taj

Jinal Shah , Jinal Shah : Mumbai, Thu Nov 26 2009, 23:43 hrs

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Dressed in full sleeve white-and-blue striped shirt and jeans, 27-year-old Sunil Kumar Jodha, a National Security Guard commando, looks like any other man in the crowd that gathered outside Taj Mahal Hotel ahead of the 26/11 anniversary. However, the tell-tale scars and stitches he meticulously hides bear testimony to the horror he had confronted a year ago.

Jodha was in the unit led by late Major Sandeep Unnikrishnan, which stormed Taj Mahal Hotel on November 27 morning to flush out the four terrorists holed up inside. An year later, Jodha is back in the city and visited the hotel with his family where he fought with the terrorists for over 15 hours before taking seven bullets (three in the left hand, one on his right palm, two in the right shoulder and one in his chest).

"I will never forget Sandeep sir; it is only because of him that I am alive," said Jodha who is now an office staff in the NSG office. "When we were inside, Sandeep sir whispered to me 'Sunil ikhate maat chalo fire hogi to hum sab mareinge' (lets not go together, if they fire we'll all die). We came down from room 271, clearing each floor, but when

we reached the ground floor, I was in the front and terrorists shot from behind. Sandeep sir gave a cover firing and two other commandos pulled me out," recalls Jodha adding, "Even as I was pulled out, sir took on the terrorist's head on and finally succumbed when one of the terrorists lobbed a hand grenade."

In Mumbai, Jodha visited Taj kitchen and the route they took on that day. "We were put on standby. We were supplied food inside, wrapped in paper by the local army team. Two hours later our team was asked to storm inside," recalls Jodha adding, "Today when I visited those same corridors I can't see the restored Taj; all I see are bodies strewn around randomly."

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