

DAILY NEWS

Sikh Army Ranger recalls anguish of forced beard, head shave

BY RICH SCHAPIRO

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Capt. Simratpal Singh received a Bronze Star in Afghanistan. (JOVELLE TAMAYO, THE SIKH COALITION)

U.S. Army Capt. Simratpal Singh still remembers how he felt when a military barber took a buzzer to his bearded face and the head of hair that he kept covered in a turban.

It was 2006, and Singh, an observant Sikh who had never cut his hair or beard, was in his first day at the West Point military academy.

“It was excruciating,” Singh, 28, told the Daily News. “For 18 years of your life, you’ve had a certain image of yourself. All of a sudden, it’s shattered within 10 minutes.”

Ten years later, Singh, now an Army Ranger and Bronze Star Medal recipient, can finally reclaim that image.

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The Army has made permanent a religious accommodation for Singh that allows him to grow his beard and wear a turban.

The decision released Friday makes Singh the first active-duty combat soldier in decades to be permitted to wear a turban and beard.