

BLOOD BROTHERS

Brothers

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what had happened, but they still had to pump themselves up for the fight.

They watched “300” and “Gladiator” — Sgt. Willsun Mock went so far as to have “Strength” and “Honor” tattooed from the inside of his elbows to his wrists.

“Instead of a handshake, he’d grab your wrist like the Romans and say, ‘Strength. Honor,’” Staff Sgt. Robin Johnson said. “And he meant it. He liked the Roman warriors, and I liked the Spartans. We’d go back and forth over who was the best.”

Ybay, 38 and the father figure of the company with 14 years in the Army, called Johnson, Mock and Spc. Daniel Agami the “Three Musketeers,” but Johnson said they were more like brothers. They spent all their waking hours together — including several a day lifting weights.

“We were going to gain 15 pounds, cut up and shred down,” said Johnson, his accent giving

away his South Boston roots.

He and Mock were both fiercely Irish, with the Claddagh rings and Irish knots to prove it.

Chagoya and Mock were also close.

“He loved to dance salsa, merengue,” Chagoya said. “I’d be dancing with a girl and he’d stop me: ‘Hey Gunny — teach me another step.’ This little white boy trying to dance salsa at the club. That was Mock.”

On Oct. 22, Mock became the second Charlie soldier killed when an IED hit his Humvee near Loyalty.

For a month, Johnson stopped working out, refusing to move except to go on patrol or eat.

“I went into complete ‘I don’t care’ mode,” he said. “But then Agami said, ‘Will’s laughing at us.’”

Hard-earned ticket home

Ladue earned his first Purple Heart in late October, when 1st Platoon made a traffic stop on a car with three young men in it.

“We caught a lot of bad guys by pulling over vehicles with more than two young guys in there,” he said. This time, all they found

was a big bag of worthless Iraqi money.

Then Ladue heard a bullet rushing toward him.

“It sounded fast and just whizzing,” he said. “I froze. It hit me. I just felt a sharp burning pain.”

He didn’t fall after the bullet hit him in the shoulder: He turned around and started shooting at a building.

“Then the little voice of reason said, ‘Hey dumb-ass. You just got shot,’” he said.

He spent two days at the military hospital in Baghdad and then was sent back to Adhamiya. He was there Nov. 5, when an Iraqi court found Saddam Hussein guilty of crimes against humanity and sentenced him to death by hanging. Gen. Petraeus praised the Iraqi people because Baghdad remained quiet following the announcement.

Except for Adhamiya.

“We started hearing gunfire as soon as the verdict was announced,” Ybay said. Then insurgents attacked Apache.

“We were hopping to fight,” Chagoya said. “We could tell who



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Capt. Mike Baka, left, commanded Charlie 1-26 until March 2007.

the enemy was. They gave us a little fight — about three hours.”

Charlie troops put down the attack, then mounted up to engage insurgents outside the wire.

At Abu Hanifa mosque, they ran

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into small-arms fire, grenades and rocket-propelled grenade rounds, but 2nd Platoon took out several insurgents and had no losses.

First Platoon followed and during a night search found a house with 40 men hiding inside. One of them had a shotgun, and as the man kicked the gate open, Newland shot him in the head with a 25mm high-explosive round from his Bradley.

“We refer to him as ‘split face,’ because that’s what happened,” Newland said. “He started puking out of his neck. It was pretty nasty.”

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