

BLOOD BROTHERS

take apart and reassemble their night-vision goggles — blindfolded.

As he demonstrated, he could hear giggling, and then a flash went off. It was a digital camera.

“Man, I knew they were up to something,” Chagoya said, shaking his head. “They showed me the picture, and I see the ass of McGinnis right next to my head.”

McGinnis was probably the only private who could tease Chagoya about being a former Marine. A grenade had gone off underneath Baka’s Humvee, and a dud had landed in the Humvee with Newland and McGinnis, so the platoon spent a week tossing tennis balls at vehicles and trying to deflect them, or, failing that, diving out of the Humvees.

“Marine! You will jump on that grenade!” McGinnis yelled at Chagoya, impersonating a Marine drill instructor. Then McGinnis laughed and said, “F--- that! I’d be like, ‘See ya!’”

Gruesome reality

The jokes couldn’t keep reality at bay.

On Oct. 17, about two months into the deployment, Charlie Company lost its first man when a sniper shot Staff Sgt. Garth Sizemore in the stomach on the way from Forward Operating Base Loyalty to Apache.

“I started to wise up after that,” Ladue said. “Before, it was just driving around in a hot-ass truck.”

Some of the guys channeled their emotions into unlikely jobs. For Sgt. Erik Osterman, that meant cleaning out the Humvees and Bradleys that came back to Apache after Americans had died in them.

Osterman, a former bartender and concealed-carry weapons permit instructor with an intense gaze, said he made the decision instinctively.

He would do it so his troops would not have to.

Osterman asked the first sergeant to get him every time a truck needed to be cleaned out, and then he’d send the guys off on errands while he hosed out the blood. The cook supplied him with scrubbies and bleach.

He would do it in an attempt to erase any reminder of death when his troops went back outside the wire in the same vehicles.

“They’re not going to roll like that,” Osterman said. “That would be all they see.”

Charlie Company spent a lot of time trying not to think about

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‘Nothing was done’

Wounded in Iraq, Staff Sgt. Ian Newland came back to a system utterly unprepared for him

The grenade clanked off the Humvee turret and then dropped inside. The explosion drove shrapnel into every limb of Staff Sgt. Ian Newland’s body. Hours after the incident, he arrived at Landstuhl Regional Medical Center in Germany.

Every soldier believes that if he makes it to an Army hospital, he’s going to be treated to the best care.

But just two days later, Dec. 6, 2006, the hospital sent Newland home — doped up on morphine, his left hand a useless claw, and nerve damage so bad to his left leg he could barely walk.

“They told me they needed the bed,” said Newland, who then lived in Schweinfurt, headquarters of 1st Infantry Division.

He was not told when he was discharged that a scan showed he also had suffered traumatic brain

injury, and so did not understand why he stuttered, had blurry vision and experienced short-term memory loss.

There was no homecoming for this wounded soldier, who arrived from Iraq with a Purple Heart pinned to his blanket. He had no key to his house, so the fire department broke in for him — and later sent a bill for the job.

And when he finally got inside his house, it was empty — his wife, Erin, was in the States for Thanksgiving, unaware that her husband had been seriously wounded in combat.

“I didn’t even get a call from the unit,” Erin Newland said. “Before I left, I gave the unit all my phone numbers, but they didn’t call.”

She was shopping in a Wal-Mart in Minnesota when Ian’s aunt called her: “He’s been in an acci-

dent. You need to call his dad.”

She immediately tried to get back to Germany. But tickets for her and her two toddlers would cost \$6,000. She contacted the Army and requested to be put on the priority list for a space-available flight.

“They told me I had to have a commander’s note,” she said. She would spend days getting back to Germany — the unit never did send the paperwork she needed for the priority list. At home, Ian dug through a bag the nurses had sent with him, hoping for a prescription for pain medicine and directions for care. He found a shaving kit and no further information.

“When the pain got so bad it was intolerable, I went to the health clinic,” he said. “They said, ‘There’s a phone right there. You need to make an appointment.’”

It would be a week before any-

Staff Sgt. Ian Newland, who suffered multiple wounds in a grenade explosion, is critical of the lack of care given to returning wounded. He is recuperating at home in Centennial, Colo., with his wife, Erin, and children: Haley, 5, and Dryden, 3.

one could see him at the clinic in Schweinfurt.

“I pulled the Spec-4 through the window and threw him on the floor,” Newland said. “They told me I had mental health issues. But there was no psychiatrist [in Schweinfurt]. I was like, ‘I’m bleeding in your clinic here.’”

Newland informed his command he planned to blow up the health clinic. That got an ear.

“I went straight to the Schweinfurt commander,” he said, describing all the shortcomings he and fellow wounded had endured in trying to get proper medical care.

“I told them, ‘You know my guys are in a high-conflict area. You’ve got guys living in the barracks in wheelchairs,’” he said. “I skipped every chain of command possible.” Still, he said, “nothing was done.”

Newland took it upon himself to care for the wounded at Conn Barracks in Schweinfurt, keeping their appointments marked on a

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