

**Left, trying to maneuver to avoid sniper fire, members of 2nd Platoon, Charlie Company, 1st Battalion, 26th Infantry Regiment, run toward a roadside blast that killed three fellow soldiers in March in the Adhamiya area of Baghdad. Right, others from Charlie 1-26, right, patrol the same neighborhood.**

than 300 insurgents, including high-value targets, and find hundreds of explosive devices. But 122 men would receive Purple Hearts and 31 would die, more than in any Army battalion since Vietnam.

One respected sergeant in Alpha Company would kill himself. A Charlie Company soldier would go home with three Purple Hearts and a lost dream. A buddy would be nominated for the Medal of Honor after saving four of his brothers. And there would be one brief mutiny.

Still, numbers don't tell the story.

#### 'Just blood everywhere'

In its glory days, the mansions of Saddam Hussein's favorite minions rose from the dust of Adhamiya, an ancient neighborhood in northeastern Baghdad. Army generals and Sunni leaders shared the area near Baghdad's most important Sunni mosque, Abu Hanifa.

Adhamiya was the last neighborhood to fall when U.S. forces tore into Baghdad in 2003, and anti-American slogans still emblazon bullet-pocked walls.

For the six months prior to 1-26's arrival, no Americans had patrolled its winding streets. A mostly Shiite Iraqi army kept watch over the neighborhood, and Sunni citizens suffered corruption and violent reprisals.

Those conditions left Adhamiya in anarchy, and seared images of hatred and suffering into the minds of the young men of Charlie Company.

When they arrived in August 2006, soldiers with 1-26 found about 250 dead Iraqi civilians a month. Many of the soldiers, including Staff Sgt. Ian Newland, 27, had deployed with the unit to Samarra in 2004, but that hadn't prepared them for Adhamiya.

They arrived upbeat and confident they could make a difference. Such expectations eroded every time they went outside the wire.

"This deployment, every patrol you're finding dead people," Newland said. "It's like one to 12 a patrol. Their eyes are gouged out. Their arms are broken. We saw a



kid who had been shot 10 to 15 times."

Another man had been shot through both hands and his shoulders.

"They laid him out like Jesus," Newland said. "Just blood everywhere. That sticks with you."

Newland joined the Army in 2002 to escape a life of poverty in Dayton, Ohio. He had dropped out of high school in 10th grade, and then lived on welfare with his wife and young daughter while working two jobs.

In the Army, he emerged as one of the brightest, making staff sergeant in four years. As team leader, he made soldiers who got in trouble write papers about World War II hero Audie Murphy or the carbine system.

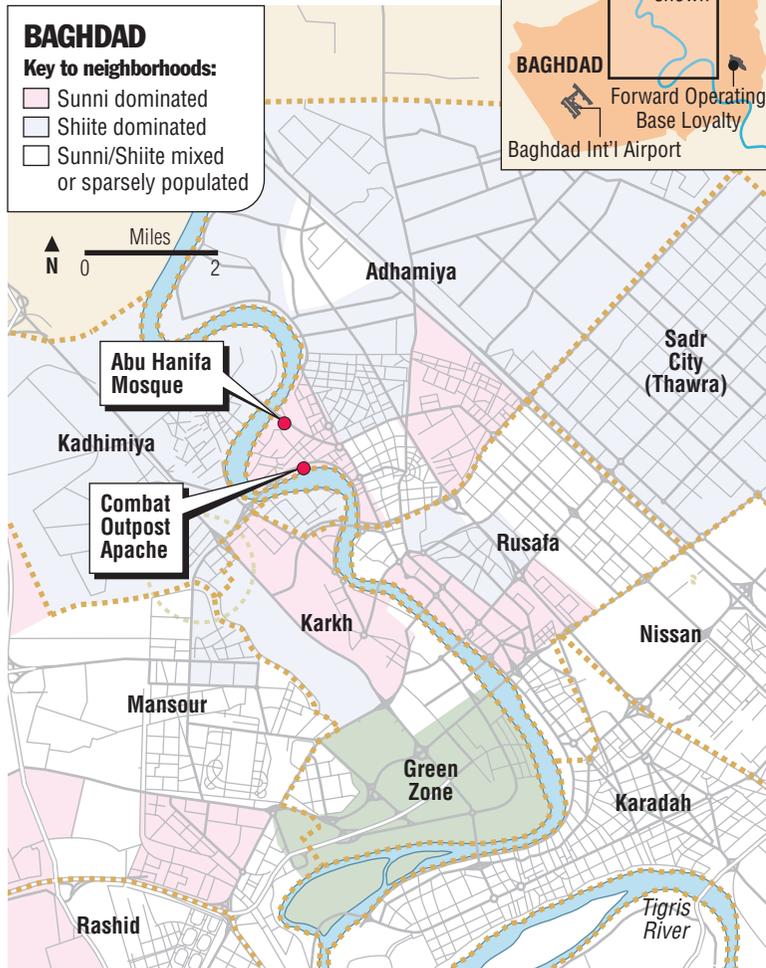
Charlie 1-26 slept 25 to a room in a decrepit and sour-smelling basement. Tiles hung from the ceiling, leaving dust on their faces when they woke in the mornings. They patrolled all day in full body armor, but could shower only once every week or two. They had only port-a-johns in the 117-degree heat.

"I thought it was a dump," said Sgt. Shawn Ladue, 27. "Every time it'd rain, we'd get that stagnant-ass water in the basement."

Ladue joined the Army in 1997 after dropping out of high school in Phoenix, got out of the military a couple years later to learn a civilian trade, bounced around from auto mechanic school to

## MEAN STREETS OF ADAMIYA

Outside Combat Outpost Apache, sectarian violence ruled, bodies littered the streets and members of Charlie 1-26 risked their lives in a Sunni-dominated area where locals wanted them dead or gone.



Source: Humanitarian Information Center for Iraq

JOHN BRETSCHNEIDER/STAFF

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[www.armytimes.com/bloodbrothers](http://www.armytimes.com/bloodbrothers)

## VIDEO

- Staff Sgt. Ian Newland recalls a buddy saving his life by throwing himself on a grenade. That buddy is up for a posthumous Medal of Honor.
- Sgt. Erik Osterman explains why it was important to him to personally clean the vehicles where his men bled and died.
- A third Purple Heart was Sgt. Shawn Ladue's ticket out of combat for a cause he has come to doubt.

## PHOTO GALLERIES

An intimate look at the combat vets of Charlie 1-26.

## ABOUT THIS SERIES

Staff writer Kelly Kennedy and photographers James J. Lee and Rick Kozak first met the soldiers at the heart of this story when they were in Adhamiya, Iraq, in the spring and summer of 2007.

They interviewed dozens of soldiers, family members and others in Iraq, Germany, Colorado and Washington, D.C., for this series.

### Part 1

The soldiers of Charlie 1-26 constantly patrolled the Sunni stronghold of Baghdad's Adhamiya neighborhood and paid a heavy price. One soldier would be nominated posthumously for the nation's highest valor award.

### Next week

Five members of 1-26 die inside a burning vehicle. The mounting casualty count wears down the fighting spirit of many in the unit.

### Dec. 17

Charlie 1-26 members are emotionally frazzled; some seek tranquilizers from the medics. Some refuse orders to patrol a particularly dangerous area.

### Dec. 24

After 15 months in the war zone, Charlie 1-26 is back home in Germany. But leaving it all behind is not as easy as the eight-hour flight from Baghdad.

See **BROTHERS** next page