

BLOOD BROTHERS

Brothers

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triggerman who set off the IED that killed Hartge and Campos.

DeNardi and Staff Sgt. Vincent Clinard saw the guy outside a building. DeNardi grabbed an Iraqi Army 9mm Glock, and he and Clinard raced after Hartge's accused killer. "We jumped a fence, but Clinard got caught up on a wall," DeNardi said. "I ran inside and ran right into the guy coming down the stairs. I forced my gun into his eye socket, and that was when he started crying. "I wanted to kill him so bad," DeNardi said. "Instead, I pretty much crushed his eye socket. I got promoted to specialist like five minutes later."

Charlie Company kept going out — three and four patrols per soldier per day. The feel of each patrol could be entirely different: searching for IEDs and blasting them with the bomb squad in the morning, then checking in with the neighbors in the afternoon to see if they had everything they needed,

or if, by chance, they knew anything about the IED that had been found down the street. Charlie Company handed out chem lights and soccer balls, and they secured areas so schools could be built.

But they couldn't get past the feeling that something worse loomed.

'Nobody was coming back'

On the morning of June 21, Chagoya's Bradley came in the gate at Apache as Spc. Daniel Agami's went out. The two gun-

ners grinned at each other and lifted their chins in greeting.

"We passed them and said, 'What's up?'" Chagoya said. "That's the last time we said, 'What's up.'"

Within an hour, everyone heard the deep thud of an explosion. Faces immediately went grim, and then the call came in. Wood's Bradley had hit an IED. It had flipped over. It was on fire. Six men were trapped inside.

DeNardi had the day off, but this was 2nd Platoon — his platoon.

PHOTOS COURTESY MEMBERS OF CHARLIE CO., 1ST BATTALION, 26TH INFANTRY REGIMENT
Insurgents on June 21 killed five soldiers riding in a Bradley fighting vehicle, including three pictured above: Sgt. Ryan Wood, far left; Pfc. Anthony Hebert, center photo; and Sgt. Alphonso Montenegro Jr., far right.

He raced to the gate, screaming at the guards to let him out.

"Open the door!" he yelled. "I can run it!" When the guards refused to let him out, he fired off a couple of rounds toward the Abu Hanifa Mosque. That's where the explosion had come from. Then he ran back to the main building. He saw a guy sitting outside, not

geared up, and said, "Where the f---k's the [quick reaction force]?"

The soldier answered, "I don't know. Go find it."

DeNardi said he clocked him in the head with his Kevlar helmet and then ran to find Johnson, who immediately loaded up four

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