

BLOOD BROTHERS

Brothers

From previous page

him “brother” and gives him a hug. He knows they had his back, and he said Spc. Ross McGinnis proved it when he gave up his life by throwing himself on a grenade to save four friends.

“We all say, ‘I don’t know what I would have done,’” he said. “But every single one was willing to die for somebody else.”

That makes it all the harder to come back and feel like the war will never be won.

“I don’t think it’s ever going to end,” he said. “For every one we kill, three more are going to pop up. We can defeat each network, but they’ll just go somewhere else. We used to make fun of the soldiers in Baghdad when we were in Fallujah and Samarra. Then it was Ramadi. Now it’s Baghdad. It’s almost like we’re chasing our tails.” For a time, he said, soldiers will make an area better, but the Iraqi people “don’t keep it better.”

Sgt. 1st Class Tim Ybay moved into his new office as first sergeant



Members of 1-26 attend “Salsa Night” at a club in Schweinfurt, Germany.

of Charlie Company. Three of the company’s platoon sergeants had moved into first sergeant positions within the battalion. Ybay had taken on other responsibilities as well: helping with his children’s homework. While he was in Iraq, Timothy, 12, Aryana, 8, and Tyler, 5, sent e-mails and drawings, while

his wife, Maybelline, made sure he could talk to them on the phone.

“I never threw those pictures away,” Ybay said. “That tears me up. My son — he really surprised me. He’s getting tall.”

But his surrogate family was still on his mind, as were the nine men who died in his platoon.

“First Sergeant [Kenneth] Hendrix said, ‘Let’s do a prayer for the soldiers we lost,’ the day we flew out of Taji,” Ybay said, speaking of the Army camp outside Baghdad. “That hurt me a lot. I’m coming home and my battle buddies weren’t. I say a prayer for them every night.”

The deployment taught him a lesson with actions that he said Staff Sgt. Garth Sizemore had tried to teach him with words. Sizemore was fatally shot Oct. 16, 2006.

“He would always say, ‘Enough of the war stories,’” Ybay said. “I didn’t understand that until this deployment. You talk about the good times.”

He learned other lessons: Deployments should not last longer than a year, and soldiers should have more time off. And he was upset when the platoon was split apart after they refused to go out on a mission.

“I understand where the commander’s coming from,” he said. “But it did hurt. I would like to come back in formation with all my guys — they did outstanding. I’m proud of them.”

When they’d regained some

sense of self, Charlie Company crowded into the local clubs. They gathered in groups, toasting each other and their 14 friends. They ordered beers and passed around shots and acted as if they had been away from each other for years rather than hours. They talked about old times like grizzled old men at the VFW.

They drank their beer, arms wrapped around each other. They told endless stories. They’d heard them all before but they couldn’t help but listen: chasing down that moped with a Bradley. The rocket battle with an insurgent. Karaoke in the basement at Apache. They comforted each other as they cried thinking about the 14 men who should have been there with them.

Remember how Pfc. Daniel Agami gave up his clothes when Johnson’s laundry got lost?

How Pfc. Alberto Garcia learned to play Johnny Cash songs within a week of picking up a guitar?

Remember when Pfc. Anthony Hebert wore that purple wig all day on patrol?

And how McGinnis could always make us laugh?

Always. □



TUI UNIVERSITY

Formerly Touro University International
EDUCATION WITHOUT BOUNDARIES



About TUI | Why TUI | Faculty | Inquiries | Apply | Contact Us | Support | Course Net | Grad 2006 | Faculty Career Opportunities | Alumni

The most
powerful weapon
in your arsenal



One mouse-click and you are on your way to a degree in EDUCATION at NO COST TO YOU!

AT NO TUITION COST TO YOU earn a degree and set your sights on a high-paying career in almost any professional field you want. Hundreds of thousands of active-duty military personnel have gone through our online education programs; so can you.

Contact us today – the rest of your career is only a mouse-click away.

- 100% Online
- Special rates for spouses
- No tuition cost for active-duty – up to 28 units a year.
- SOC and DANTES affiliated.
- Member of the GoArmyEd network.
- Earn units around TDY's and Deployments.
- Earn a Bachelor's or Master's Degree.

Now accepting applications for Winter 2008

E-mail: infocoe@tourou.edu • Phone: (800) 579 3160 • www.tourou.edu