

BLOOD BROTHERS

Brothers

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The day ended with 38 dead insurgents and 10 wounded, with no U.S. casualties. But the danger that U.S. troops faced hardly subsided.

On a night patrol a few days before Thanksgiving, Ladue and his crew drove past Abu Hanifa and the new graveyard that had been dug in a children's soccer field. Near it ran a trench.

"We always talked about how they would put an IED there," Ladue said. They did.

As he thought about the probability, the IED went off. "I tasted engine oil," Ladue said. "I couldn't see nothing. My gunner, [Pfc. Eduardo] Gutierrez, started shooting at the mosque."

Then he heard the driver, Spc. Matthew Yearwood, screaming, "My legs! My legs!" The steering column had collapsed on him. "Get us the f--- out of here," Ladue yelled over the radio.

The other Humvees pushed

them back to Apache. Yearwood was not seriously injured, but Ladue had a massive concussion — and his second Purple Heart.

"Everybody walked away from that," Ladue said. "It scared us. The next time we went out, we were terrified."

That next time was Thanksgiving night. Ladue asked Staff Sgt. Christopher Cunningham to take the lead truck. "I took [the middle position] because my driver, especially, and I were pretty spooked."

During the first three hours of patrol, they drove past the cemetery where they had been blown up a couple of days before.

"We went right over it," Ladue said. "I was going out of my mind I was so scared."

During break, his buddy Staff Sgt. Juan Campos gave him a hard time, but Ladue wasn't in a state to be teased.

"It kind of hurt when he said, 'Quit being a pussy,'" Ladue said. "Me and Juan didn't talk to each other the rest of the break."

They drove into the market area — usually fairly safe, so Ladue felt relieved. Then the explosion hit. "Not again! Not

again!" Yearwood screamed.

Ladue stuck his M4 out the blown-open door of his Humvee. He let off one round, and then the pain hit.

"Oh, I'm f----d up! Oh, I'm f----d up!"

The IED had blown a hole through his foot, leaving it a bloody mass of smashed bone and pulp.

Campos was the first to reach the Humvee. "I didn't mean it, man," Campos said. "I'm sorry."

That was the last time Ladue would see his friend.

"I just remember arriving at the Green Zone, under a thin-ass blanket, freezing," Ladue said. "After that, things got a little fuzzy." He would get his third Purple Heart, and that was his ticket out of the war zone.

That was also Yearwood's last patrol. His brother had been killed by an IED in Iraq during Operation Iraqi Freedom II, and the company moved him to headquarters platoon.

'The grenade is in the truck!'

On Dec. 4, 1st Platoon rolled out of Apache looking for a place to put a generator to provide elec-



tricity for 100 homes. As the six-truck convoy rode through the narrow alleyways of Adhamiyah, McGinnis, in the turret of the last Humvee, manned his .50-cal as usual.

Sgt. 1st Class Cedric Thomas served as truck commander, Sgt. Lyle Buehler drove, and Newland and medic Pfc. Sean Lawson rode in the back.

"Grenade!" McGinnis yelled after someone dropped one from a rooftop. "The grenade is in the truck!"

McGinnis could have leapt from his turret. Instead, he tried to catch the grenade, just as he had done with Chagoya and others when the

platoon practiced with tennis balls. As it ricocheted around the turret, he fumbled and the grenade dropped into the Humvee.

"When he yelled 'grenade,' I wasn't even alarmed because we'd seen so many," Newland said. "Then I saw it. It was next to me."

McGinnis quickly dropped into the Humvee and smothered the grenade with his body. "I heard him say, 'It's right here,'" Newland said.

McGinnis absorbed the brunt of the explosion.

Through the smoke and confusion, Newland didn't yet understand what had happened.

Buehler saw a man on the roof of a building and started shooting as Newland reached for McGinnis. "I remember seeing his eyes moving around," Newland said. "I grabbed his hand and started praying."

Then he realized he also was injured. Newland looked down through the cloud of black smoke.

"It was like a horror movie watching blood come out of my side," he said.

His jaw hurt — a 4-inch piece of

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