

BLOOD BROTHERS

Building a life after escaping death

Ian Newland gets help as he struggles to plan his future

Staff Sgt. Ian Newland promised after Pfc. Ross McGinnis died to save his life that he would never waste the gift.

"I very easily could have died that day," Newland said. "But my children still have a father. I try to live each day to its fullest potential because of what he did for me."

On Dec. 4, 2006, an insurgent tossed a hand grenade through the turret of the Humvee in which McGinnis, 19, was manning the .50-caliber machine gun. McGinnis could have followed training procedures and jumped from the turret and saved himself. Instead, he threw himself on the grenade and absorbed the blast, saving four men, including Newland. For his heroic actions, McGinnis has been nominated for the Medal of Honor.

But Newland said that though his friend's sacrifice allowed him to live, he does so with guilt and pain that have made it difficult to honor his promise.

"I thought I could have done more," Newland said during an interview at his Colorado home. "Every second, I was reliving it. All of a sudden, I'm in the Humvee again and the grenade goes off."

He traveled to Arlington National Cemetery in Virginia outside Washington, D.C., for McGinnis' funeral services, and there he met McGinnis' family.

"They were so loving and so compassionate," Newland said. "I thought it was hard losing my soldier — this was just too much. But his dad grabbed me and said, 'You don't owe my son anything.'"



MICHELLE TAN/STAFF

Maj. Mike Baka, left, and Lt. Col. (P) Eric Schacht, center, prepare to present Staff Sgt. Ian Newland with the Meritorious Service Award on Dec. 4 at Arlington National Cemetery, Va. The men served together in Iraq in 1st Battalion, 26th Infantry Regiment. Newland was wounded Dec. 4, 2006, when a grenade exploded in his Humvee while on patrol in Adhamiya, Iraq. The presentation took place after a promotion ceremony for Baka, who commanded C Company, 1-26 Infantry; and Baka chose to have his ceremony that day to honor Spc. Ross McGinnis, who died when he threw himself on the grenade that wounded Newland.

Growing up in Ohio, Newland had the sort of tough life that leads many to military service as a way out. He came from an alcoholic family and was ashamed of the welfare-status existence he led before he joined the Army even though he was working two jobs. He excelled as an infantryman and loved the soldier's life. But after the grenade embedded hundreds of pieces of shrapnel throughout his limbs, causing nerve damage that forces him to walk with a cane and leaving him without the use of three fingers,

he found himself at the bottom again.

"After I was wounded, I had nowhere to turn," he said. No one told him about the Wounded Warriors program. He had been boot-ed out of Landstuhl Army Medical Center in Germany, still heavily medicated and with no instructions about future treatment. And no one bothered to tell him he had been diagnosed with a traumatic brain injury. He fought for benefits and treatment; he worked to make sure the other wounded soldiers living in the barracks made

their appointments and got what they needed. And he started to fall apart. So did his marriage as he tried to deal with his problems with alcohol.

"I was messing with her really bad," Newland said. "I'd been battling every day, screaming at officers, and then I'd come home to Erin."

"I said, 'I can't handle this,'" his wife, Erin Newland, said. "I'm done. I just can't take this anymore."

Instead, she went online and did some research, and she talked to

the family therapist who had been assigned to take care of her husband's post-traumatic stress disorder.

"I learned to not get into it with him and not get mad," she said. "Instead, I'd just need to let him do his ranting and raving."

"She was able to identify when I was getting angry, and she would back off," he said. "If I wasn't in a strong marriage, I don't know where I'd be right now."

But he kept getting slapped down. Pfc. Chad Marsh's family asked him to fly back with the soldier's remains from Germany to Wichita, Kan. Marsh died Feb. 21 in an IED blast, and he had been one of Newland's soldiers.

"Mortuary affairs said I couldn't do it again because it wasn't the image the Army wanted to present," Newland said. "Broken soldier."

Then he found out about his disability rating of 80 percent: \$800 a month for a family of four. He had to create a new life for himself.

He started looking for civilian work at Fort Carson, Colo. "I wanted to go somewhere I could find work and that was beautiful," he said. He'd never been to Colorado before. "As soon as I saw the mountains, I was sold." But after spending the last of his savings to fly out there from Germany, a mortgage broker who had promised to help with a home loan dropped him because of his financial situation. Even after he found a job, the bank said no. "At that point, I realized things were going to hell," he said. "They shot me down after telling me to fly out."

Desperate, he went to the chapel at Fort Carson and he prayed. As he left, downtrodden, another veteran stopped him and asked what was wrong. He hooked Newland up with Mike Conklin.

Conklin founded an organization called Sentinels of Freedom that is designed to help wounded veterans build a future by finding them jobs and making sure their education is paid for up to the doctorate level.

After talking with Newland on the phone from California, Conklin said, "I'm getting on a plane,

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Feb. 18, 2007 Pfc. Chad Marsh	Feb. 20, 2007 Pfc. Louis Kim	March 13, 2007 Pfc. Alberto Garcia Jr.	May 14, 2007 Spc. Nicholas Hartge	June 1, 2007 Staff Sgt. Juan Campos	June 21, 2007 Spc. Daniel Agami	June 21, 2007 Spc. Anthony Hebert	June 21, 2007 Spc. Thomas Leenhuis	June 21, 2007 Sgt. Alphonso Montenegro	June 21, 2007 Sgt. Ryan Wood	July 11, 2007 1st Sgt. Jeffrey McKinney	July 18, 2007 Spc. Zachary Clouser	July 18, 2007 Spc. Richard Gilmore	July 18, 2007 Spc. Daniel Gomez	July 18, 2007 Sgt. 1st Class Luis Gutierrez-Rosales
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