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### STRYKER SOLDIERS RALLY TO INJURED COMRADE, TAKE OUT INSURGENTS IN EAST RASHID FIREFIGHT

By Spc. Jeff Ledesma

1st Cavalry Division Public Affairs Office

**BAGHDAD, Iraq --** “In the name of God, I take back this house from the non-Muslim,” a Sunni interpreter reads from a gate. “Signed, al-Qaeda in Iraq.”

Pretty plain evidence that this neighborhood in the Iraqi capital's East Rashid District is an insurgent stronghold.

As Soldiers weave through desolate, maze-like streets peppered with improvised explosive devices, they see several more doors and gates painted with signs that Muslim fanaticism lives here.

Danger lingers on street corners and rooftops, but U.S. Army, Europe Soldiers of the 3rd Squadron, 2nd Stryker Cavalry Regiment serving with Multi-National

Division - Baghdad wanted to send a clear message of their own to the insurgency Sept. 20.



SPC JEFF LEDESMA

1st Lt. Eric Owens, platoon leader with Company G, 3rd Squadron, 2nd Stryker Cavalry Regiment, radios in a for medical assistance after one of his Soldiers was injured during an insurgent attack in Baghdad's East Rashid District Sept. 20.

The Vilseck, Germany-based Stryker Soldiers, have been in the country for less than two months, tackling their mission one weapons cache, one suspected insurgent and one

roadside bomb at a time in a battle that Staff Sgt. Jared Utter described as possibly "one of the biggest fights in Iraq right now."

The unit is just a month into the 15 they will stay here, but Utter, a squad leader in Company G's 2nd platoon, said his troops have seen more than a month's worth of action in their five straight days of patrolling in this sector.

This particular day started like the others, with the sun a blazing orange backdrop to the company's formation of eight-wheeled Stryker armored combat vehicles.

It took about an hour to get to the neighborhood and begin searching a place where only six out of 36 houses were occupied. In one of the houses the Soldiers of 2nd platoon discovered handmade, highly explosive materials in a house they had cleared the day before.

"This is not the first time we've seen (insurgents) come in behind us," said 1st Lt. Eric Owens, the 2nd platoon leader. An explosive ordnance disposal team was called in and destroyed the explosives, and the company moved on.



SPC JEFF LEDESMA  
Squad leader Staff Sgt. Jared Utter of Company G, 3rd Squadron, 2nd Stryker Cavalry Regiment, holds the hand of injured squad member Spc. J. Jacobs as the specialist's condition is assessed, following a firefight in Baghdad's East Rashid District Sept. 20.

A little after 1 p.m., behind a shield of white smoke, Soldiers from the 3rd squad maneuvered across 60th Street, a road with a direct view of an open field, when something exploded and bullets started to fly.

"I saw tracers hit the ground. They opened up on us with (machine guns). We don't know if it was a mortar or (rocket-propelled grenade that exploded), but it couldn't have hit more than 20 feet away from us," said Spc. Eric Horvath. "It all happened so fast. It was like I teleported to cover."

Horvath later found pieces of shrapnel melted onto his gear.

As they continued taking heavy machine gun fire from the second story of a building across the field, Spc. J. Jacobs fell face-down onto the cement.

Jacobs said he felt the blast, grabbed his neck, saw the blood and instinctively applied pressure to the wound, a piece of shrapnel in his neck.

"I felt loopy, was hot and dizzy, and fell," the 32-year-old said. "At some point I must have lost consciousness."

“I heard the machine gun fire and turned around and got blasted in the face with something. I went to the corner and didn’t know he was down,” said Spc. Jason “Doc” Kucharski, the squad’s medic.

“I thought he was shot,” Utter said. “I thought he took one.”

Three more smoke grenades were tossed out from different directions as rounds continued to fly over Jacobs. Pfc. Victor Flores rushed for the cover of a building and laid down suppressive fire with his squad automatic weapon.

“The first thing that came to mind was to take cover and shoot back,” said Flores. “I saw someone in a white shirt, blue collar, black jeans, about 16 to 18 years old run into the building right before the contact.”



SPC JEFF LEDESMA

Soldiers with Company G, 3rd Squadron, 2nd Stryker Cavalry Regiment, lift wounded Spc. J. Jacobs into a Stryker armored combat vehicle for evacuation after the specialist was injured in an insurgent attack in Baghdad's East Rashid District. Sept. 20

“We turn around, and all we could see is Jacobs lying face-first on the corner,” said Horvath. “We weren't sure if he was dead or if he was shot. I thought he was shot, and so did Hawkins (Spc. Michael Hawkins).”

“We have a man down,” Owens called into his radio.

Team leader Sgt. Michael Huffman stopped when he saw Jacobs on the ground, and then fired an M-203 grenade as the rest of the company joined in suppressive fire.

“It took me about half a second to realize what was happening. You see bullets flying at you and that’s all it takes,” said Spc. Richard Main. “I was in the (vehicle commander’s) hole in the truck manning my 50-caliber machine gun.”

Main said knowing his buddy was down definitely made him fight harder. He fired more than 450 rounds from the truck.

“Our main goal was to get him (out of there),” Huffman said.

Still under enemy fire, Huffman and Kucharski grabbed the Jacobs and pulled him into a nearby courtyard.

“When we moved him, I saw a blood spot right where his face was,” said Kucharski. “He was struggling to breathe, but he was trying to.”

“When I came to, I was disoriented. I saw the blood. I couldn’t see or hear very well,” Jacobs said. “My chest felt like it was hit by a sledgehammer. I had a hard time breathing and I started to panic because I didn’t know what was going on.”

With a combat lifesaver, a combat medic, a physician’s assistant and his fellow Soldiers surrounding him, Jacobs condition was assessed and he was loaded onto a truck and evacuated from the area.

“It was pretty much ‘game on’ after that. Everybody ran to the rooftop, started opening up on them. I dropped almost two (magazines of ammunition) at the building that was shooting at us,” Horvath said. “It’s like an ultimate feeling of safety to fire back. Every round they shoot at us, we shoot a hundred back.”



SPC JEFF LEDESMA

The company fired back with an AT4 and Javelin anti-tank weapons and a wire-guided missile as attack helicopters and planes moved in to add Hellfire missiles and a 500-pound bomb to the fight.

Spc. Michael Hawkins of Company G, 3rd Squadron, 2nd Stryker Cavalry Regiment, watches the sky over Baghdad's over East Rashid District for a U.S. helicopter that later fired Hellfire missiles on a building insurgents used to attack his unit with heavy machine guns Sept. 20.

“(The building) is nothing but the burnt skeleton of what once was a house,” said Hawkins.

After the fight Utter praised his Soldiers for their expert maneuvering and the courage they showed going to Jacobs aid under fire.

Jacobs suffered a concussion and a hairline fracture of the left cheek and sinus cavity, in addition to the shrapnel wound in his neck. He is expected to be back on patrol with his comrades in a week.

