

173rd paratrooper killed by enemy fire

Story and photos by

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Paratroopers of Delta Battery, 319th Field Artillery and Charlie Company, 1st Battalion, 508th Infantry (Airborne) are mourning the loss of a colleague who was killed Aug. 1.

Spc. Justin W. Hebert, a forward observer in D Btry, 319th FA, attached to Charlie Company, 1-508th Inf (Abn), was killed during a night patrol when a rocket-propelled grenade struck his Humvee in Jar Salha, Iraq, just four days after his 20th birthday. Three paratroopers from Charlie Company were also injured in the attack. "He was the best soldier I've worked with in my ten years of service," said Sgt. Jeffrey Bradford, D Btry, 319th FA.

Hebert was the first paratrooper killed by enemy fire since the 173d Airborne Brigade deployed to Northern Iraq in March.

While serving with the 173d Abn Bde, Hebert had made jumps into five different countries: Italy, Germany, Hungary, Kosovo and Iraq.

After jumping into Bashur Airfield with Charlie Company as their forward observer, Hebert stayed with the unit and participated in numerous raids, searches and patrols in their area of operation.

Hebert took part in helping his fellow paratroopers establish law and order in Kirkuk by helping stop crime in sector that was anti-American, but that sector represented a small amount of the city's population.

After the local government of Kirkuk was established and a mayor elected, Charlie Company moved southwest to Jar Salha, Iraq, with the rest of 1-508th Inf (Abn), to help 4th Infantry Division in one of their many areas of operation.

Together, Delta Battery and Charlie Company held a memorial service to honor Hebert as a fellow paratrooper and as a friend. The memorial service was held Aug. 5 in tent city on Freedom Airfield in Kirkuk, Iraq.

More than 500 service members packed the tent to say good-bye and to pay their respects. The service included numerous events including emotional speeches from Hebert's commander and close friends.

After the memorial service, Spc. Tyler Singleton, D Btry, 319th FA, quietly responded to questions about his friend. "Justin was the best friend I had in my military career and was everything I wanted to be," he said.

"I remember one time he came to physical training formation with a bunch of band-aids on his neck," said Pvt. David Ricc, Charlie Company, 1-508th Inf (Abn). "It was obvious he was trying to cover up a hickey. Our squad leader didn't see the band-aids until later. He asked him what the band-aids were for and Hebert said he cut his neck shaving.

"Our squad leader asked him again and then made him take off the band-aids. Of course there wasn't a cut, just a big hickey. He got smoked (corrective training) for a long time," said Ricc with a smile. "The funny thing was the whole time he was being smoked he was still being a wise ass. That's just how he was."

Charlie Company got their chance to say their final good byes and honored Hebert's life at a celebration of life ceremony held at Charlie Company's safe house in Jar Salha, Iraq August 7.

At the ceremony, friends of Hebert talked about good times they had with him. After the ceremony a toast was given honoring Hebert's life.

"He was great friend," said Ricc. "I'll always miss his laugh and his great smile."