

In a ritual that is becoming too familiar, the 173d Airborne Brigade gathered Nov. 18 to mourn the death of two paratroopers.

Sgt. Joseph Minucci and Pfc. Jacob Fletcher both gave their lives Nov. 13 when an improvised explosive device was detonated near their convoy. Both Soldiers were returning from a rest and recreation trip.

As is the tradition at these memorials someone, a close friend, talks for a few moments about their fallen comrade.

“The first time I met Sgt. Joseph Minucci was five days before we jumped in,” said Spc. Justin Harper, a member of Minucci’s team. “My first impression of him was, ‘What a goofball!’ I didn’t know what to make of him, but then I got used to his personality. You never knew what he would say. Most of the time whatever he would say came out of right field and that was just the way he was.”

Harper went on to recall an incident involving an illegal Kurdish checkpoint set up in Kirkuk shortly after the city was liberated. The local police, still in their infancy, were afraid to challenge the Kurds who had emplaced the checkpoint.

“None of the cops would go there by themselves,” Harper said. “Minucci grabbed them and off they went. Some of the cops were scared but not Sgt. Minucci, he walked down the street like he owned it. When the Kurds saw him approaching they took off running. The thing I remember about that whole day was whenever he came to check on me later there was that happy look on his face. Never one of fear, even with all the gunfire and explosions going on around us in the city.”

Even when he was able to leave Iraq, Minucci didn’t want to.

“When he was going to the Primary Leadership Development Course he wasn’t happy, even though he was going to be out of Iraq for a month,” Harper said. “He wanted to stay with his team. No leader ever wants to give up his paratroopers, especially Sgt. Minucci.

“He was a paratrooper. Joe, if you can hear me now, just shut up and get in line. And oh yeah, try not to ignore Saint Peter too much,” Harper finished.

“I hope I can keep my composure,” said a choked up Spc. Carson Petry. “I want to introduce you to Jacob Fletcher. Jay to his friends back home, and Fletch to his brothers here today. Fletch was my roommate, my best friend, and like a brother to me. He loved freedom, motorcycles, and he had a talent for playing the drums.”

“Fletch had a heart of gold; he would do anything in the world for you,” Petry continued. “He was a lifelong friend and you don’t find many of those. He experienced more in his 29 years than most do in a lifetime. In fact he had ‘pain and suffering’ tattooed on his arm. It was written backwards so when he looked in a mirror he would be reminded of that reality in life.”

“If you want to take anything away from today,” Petry said to the crowd. “Look down at the ground or close your eyes and think of one person—one person you love, one person you depend on. Now imagine this is the last day that you will ever see that person again. What would you tell that person today? Whatever it is, make sure you tell them—today.”