

173d Soldiers Earn Purple Heart

By Sgt. 1st Class Todd Oliver

Two soldiers assigned to Battle Company, 2nd Battalion, 503rd Infantry were awarded purple hearts, by U.S. Army Europe Commander Gen. B .B. Bell, last week after being injured in a grenade attack early this month.

The injured soldiers are Pfc. Aaron J. Cady and Pfc. Christopher G. Taffoya. Pvt. Jeramia L. Minor was also injured in the attack but was treated and released back to his unit in Kirkuk. Cady and Taffoya were both flown to Germany and received additional medical treatment.

It is unclear if the incident was a direct attack or the result of a child playing with a grenade. The incident is still under investigation

“When we got there the men were already loaded up in the back of a cargo HMMWV,” said Sgt. Michael Sparks, a medic assigned to Battle Company, 1st Battalion, 508th Infantry. “My platoon medic, Pfc. Daniel Kucerak, had already had them bandaged up, had given them IVs and had given one some morphine for the pain.”

“One of them, Taffoya, wasn’t complaining about the pain at all,” Sparks said. “I think his adrenaline was still pumping. Cady was by far the worst—he had shrapnel in both legs and feet.”

“We just reassured them,” First Sgt. Richard Weik, Battle Company First Sergeant, said. “They both kept sounding off with ‘Battle hard first sergeant, Battle hard’ (the Battle Company motto). Minor couldn’t hear—it was kind of funny ‘cause every time we’d ask him something all he’d say was, ‘What?’”

“It as unbelievable how we reacted. The incident probably happened two miles from our safe house and we were there in less than five minutes,” Weik said. “When we arrived everyone was already applying first aid and scouring the area. I cannot say enough about my medics, it’s the one thing you really can’t train for. Most of the time they’re fixing blisters and pulling splinters out but every time here, and we’ve treated a lot of casualties, the medics have taken charge. I couldn’t be more proud of any of my soldiers.”

“You could tell those soldiers knew they were being taken care of,” Weik said. “Their morale was high. Even after the surgery, they were both kind of groggy but it was still the same thing, ‘Battle hard, First Sergeant, Battle hard.’”

Later, at the Forward Surgical Team’s area, the soldiers received additional medical treatment.

“They were covered in blood, so naturally they were scared,” said Maj. John Devine, surgeon assigned to the 250th Forward Surgical Team, 62nd Medical Group, based out of Fort Lewis, Wash. “My patient [Cady] was worried he was going to lose his finger. When someone is injured like that, they really don’t know how bad it is because they’re covered in blood and dirt.”

Describing the soldiers’ wounds, Devine explained that neither had suffered life-threatening injuries. Cady had suffered the injury to his index finger on his left hand and a bullet that had entered his right side.

Lt. Col Robert Rush, a surgeon with the 250th FST, operated on Taffoya, who suffered five shrapnel wounds to his right lower leg and another two to his left lower leg.

“Wounds like that can bother a person later on,” Rush explained. “Often, additional surgeries are needed to get all the shrapnel out. Our main concern here was to remove the obvious pieces and to irrigate the wounds in order to prevent infection.”

Both soldiers were evacuated from Kirkuk Military Airfield to Kuwait and then on to Landstuhl where they will soon board a plane for Vicenza.