



# M E D I A   R E L E A S E

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DEPARTMENT OF MILITARY

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## **Tennessee Guardsmen bond with Iraqi villagers after near-tragedy**

DEBECKA, Iraq -- It had been a fairly routine patrol for soldiers of the Tennessee Army National Guard's 30th Combat Sustainment Support Battalion, hot and dusty -- always dusty. They were a long way from the Humboldt armory where they had departed on August 3, 2008.

Shortly after arrival they hooked up with other Guardsmen, from California, to form the 16th Sustainment Brigade.

On this particular day in March, the patrol was traveling slowly through the tiny village of Debecka when suddenly a small child dashed from the roadside directly in front of a one of the military vehicles. Smiling and waving his arms, he was hoping that a piece of candy or another goody might be tossed to him by one of the soldiers.

In that instant he almost died.

If it hadn't been for the immediate reaction of the vehicle's driver, the odds are the boy would have been run down and killed, or certainly seriously injured.

Spec. Michael Rankin, a young California Guardsman, instinctively cut the vehicle sharply to the right, missing the child by inches .... but the truck's mirror still struck him in the head.

The initial examination showed that the young Iraqi suffered superficial head trauma and a depressed skull fracture.

The soldiers' hearts went out to the boy and they continually checked on him at the hospital to ensure he was getting the proper medical treatment from local authorities.

"Every single one of us felt a sense of responsibility," said Lt. Col. Tommy Baker, from Huntingdon, Commander of the Tennessee unit. "It was important to us that everything was going OK with him. At the same time we wanted the villagers to understand that we genuinely cared."

It was then that the soldiers from Tennessee and California decided they wanted to do more, and on April 1, when the young man had returned home to his family, they paid a surprise visit to him and the villagers. They were loaded down with things they'd collected: a dozen soccer balls, pens and pencils of all kinds, lots of school supplies and sacks of treats for the village children.

**(more)**

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## **Tennessee Guardsmen bond 2-2-2**

Additionally, surgeons from the brigade came along to re-examine the young boy and said it appears he is going to make a complete recovery. Spec. Rankin, who had never stopped thinking about the near-tragedy, got the chance to spend time with the boy as he was being re-examined.

"It was good to see how well he was doing, and it gave me the chance to show him that I really cared," Rankin said.

"Coming back to visit was the right thing to do," said Lt. Col Baker. "The villagers were glad to see us and it gave us the opportunity to interact with them on a personal basis. I think we made a lot of friends, and came away feeling particularly good about our strengthened relationship."

### **CUTLINES:**

**Command Sgt. Maj. Larry Lee Tidwell, from Dickson, oversees the distribution of gifts to the family of a young Iraqi boy who was struck by a military vehicle's mirror during a unit patrol. The boy is shown in the background with bandaged head. Quick reaction from the driver may have saved the youngster's life.**

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