

Guardsmen accept awards for saving a supply route

BY SPC. ANDY MILLER

SPECIAL TO SVN

BAGHDAD, Iraq — "BOOM!" The car exploded and there was nothing left but nuts and bolts.

It started out as an average day for Staff Sgt. David Jensen and Sgt. Bruce Hartman of Fox 202 Air Defense Artillery, part of the Illinois National Guard, attached to the 1st Cavalry Division. The past week had been rough on them. They had been involved in ambushes, attacks and firefights, but today was just another day patrolling the streets of Baghdad.

Then it happened. A broken-down car was parked on their patrol route.

"There was something suspicious about it, and we try to check everything that is suspicious," said Maj. Michael Kessel, the Fox 202 commander. "If something doesn't look right we stop and take a look at it. That is pretty much our (standard operating procedure)."

After driving by the dubious-looking vehicle, Jensen decided to turn his patrol convoy around for a better look. His squad put up a perimeter for security as Jensen examined the vehicle.

"We were looking at it through the (binoculars)," Jensen said. "We got closer and closer, and we were checking every angle of it. I walked up, saw that there was a cell phone sitting on the dash and a package on the driver side, and yelled out, 'Get the (heck) out of here' and ran back over."

That was when they decided to call an explosive ordnance disposal crew to the site to take care of the improvised explosive device. When EOD arrived, they noticed Hartman's M-14 sniper rifle and asked him for a favor.

"Hartman was the sniper who took out the detonating device," Kessel said. "The interesting thing is, he's trained as a cook. It took two shots: one to knock out the windows and then to knock out the detonation device."

With the windows shattered and the detonation device destroyed, the scene was safe for EOD. They blew the vehicle up in place.

"After the explosion ... we drove back and the car was gone," Hartman said. "The body of the car was gone, the frame, the axels, the motor, everything was gone. It was just nuts and bolts."

In an instant, what could have turned into catastrophe on a busy coalition supply route turned into simple nuts and bolts. Jensen and Hartman were awarded Army Commendation Medals by Maj. Gen. Peter Chiarelli, the 1st Cavalry Division commanding general, during a ceremony that took place at division headquarters.

According to Jensen and Hartman, they were just doing their jobs. It's one of those things, maybe something the person hasn't been trained to do, but he steps up and does it to the best of his ability, Hartman said.

"Neither of us are in it for awards; nobody is in it for awards," Jensen said. "At the time we didn't think about a bridge being blown up or anything. Just like any IED, it would have done harm to somebody."

Sgt. David Jensen is from Albany and was based in Dixon before going to Iraq. Sgt. Bruce Hartman is with the Galva portion of the Illinois National Guard. Approximately three dozen soldiers from the Dixon Guard unit are part of the Fox unit in Iraq.

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