

Soldiers dodge car bomb to deliver dinner

By C. Mark Brinkley, Army Times

MOSUL, Iraq — Forget about rain and sleet and snow: Army Sgt. Edmund Savedra had to brave a car bomb to make his Thanksgiving afternoon delivery.



Army Lt. Col. Todd McCaffrey inspects a bombed car that detonated against his soldiers outside Mosul.

M. Scott Mahaskey, Army Times Publishing Company

Savedra, a truck driver with the 1st Battalion, 5th Infantry Regiment, was less than 10 minutes away from a remote post outside of Mosul, where he was set to deliver hot turkey dinners to dozens of soldiers with no access to the government-contracted chow halls.

Without warning, an explosion shattered the windshield of his rig and showered the three soldiers inside with glass.

"I guess they wanted the turkey," Savedra, 33, of Honolulu said with a grin minutes after he pulled into the post.

"I didn't want to stop," he said.

Instead, he floored it, tearing across the rural highways at 50 mph without looking back to see who was shooting at him.

"Everyone here was waiting on their turkey dinner," Savedra said. "Well, I got it here."

An inspection of the blast area showed a crater 2 feet deep and a burning hull that used to be a Toyota. Army investigators theorized that insurgents buried artillery shells under the truck, then detonated them as the lightly armored dinner wagon rolled by.

Savedra was thankful that no one was injured in the blast. "It could have been a lot worse," he said.

The food came as a morale boost for the troops from Rock Company, who have lived on the outskirts of Mosul for two weeks, taking turns at the small shower facilities and longing for the somewhat easier life of their comrades at the larger posts, who have hot meals three times a day and hot water morning and night.

"I turned 25 yesterday," said Spc. Jason Martin, a rifleman from Fort Myers, Fla., who is still waiting on his first birthday card or gift from home. "Mail's been kind of slow out here. Then it's mostly bills. It's never the good stuff."

But Martin said he was thankful, despite the daily combat patrols, chilly temperatures and time apart from his wife, Patricia, who he married in April.

"I'm thankful that my life turned out so well," Martin said. "I'm not on a street corner somewhere, like a lot of people are. And I'm thankful for my wife. Really, she's the highlight of my life."

At the larger camps, there were prayer breakfasts, turkey and pie, served to the enlisted troops in traditional Army style by officers and senior non-commissioned officers. Televisions at one camp showed sports highlights, where replays of the Ron Artest fight during a recent Indiana Pacers basketball game drew cheers.

But at the smaller camps, where access to phones and the Internet is limited, there was an air of loneliness — especially from Spc. Stephen Morgan, 19, an armorer from Los Angeles.

Morgan showed off glossy photos from home he received the night before, the first real look at his 3-week-old son.

The digital pictures he received in his e-mail a week earlier didn't do the boy justice, he said.

"I was in Fallujah when he was born, getting mortared," Morgan said, pointing at the image of Johnathan Paul Morgan, who arrived Nov. 3 at 7 pounds, 14 ounces. "He'll be a year old before I see him."

Getting holiday meals to isolated troops is one of the top priorities, soldiers here said, "to make sure they're included in what's going on," said Capt. Don Carrothers, 46, the battalion's chaplain from Flagstaff, Ariz.

"Otherwise, it's real easy for them to feel unimportant," Carrothers said. "There's nothing worse than feeling left out."

And there's nothing worse than being away from home at the holidays, many troops here said. But that doesn't mean they aren't thankful for what they have.

"We're 8,000 miles away from home, what can I be thankful for?" said Spc. Erik Kenezuroff, 23, a rifleman from Olympia, Wash., pondering the question. "I'm thankful for being alive."