

Combat Medics Proven Under Pressure

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BAGHDAD – There's countless hours of training involved in becoming certified as an Army medic.

However, for some healthcare specialists, the seal of approval doesn't come with a certificate on graduation day, but from the experience of performing their duties under the added stresses a combat zone thrown into the mix.

A healthcare specialist at Joint Security Station Thrasher, Pfc. Tony Lawry said every opportunity he gets, whether lying on his cot or rolling in a convoy, he thinks about all the possible injuries that he might come across - what he might see, what his thought process will be, and what he needs to do.

"The first time I saw something I reacted with training," said Lawry, a native of the seaside town of Morro Bay, Calif. "It was exactly what I've trained to do in my head, on my buddies, on manikins hundreds of times."

On Saint Patrick's Day, when JSS Thrasher was only a couple of days old, the first challenge appeared in the form of a Soldier with a gunshot wound to the leg.

Although not the smartest of ideas, he ran from behind cover to get to the wounded Soldier and training took control.

"(The) first thing I did (was) I rushed up, cut away his pants, found the wound, put the tourniquet on, gave him morphine and got him the hell out of there," said Lawry, who is a member of 2nd Battalion, 12th Cavalry Regiment, based out of Fort Bliss, Texas and operating in Baghdad with 2nd Brigade Combat Team, 1st Infantry Division.

The gunshot victim had a "through and through," meaning the bullet went in one side and out the other.

"One of the first things medics learn is when someone is shot in the leg you just drop your knee there, jamming it on the artery," Lawry said. "You'll stop that bleeding. If it hurts the patient, not doing any further dam-



Medical staff members at the Camp Liberty aid station rush to aid casualties after an improvised explosive device detonated near a patrol April 21.

age, but is physically painful, you're probably doing it right."

Lawry said when medics are working on their fellow Soldiers, one of their own, all they think about is getting him stable and evacuated.

"You don't think about your gloves, you don't think about your safety," Lawry said. "I had my nomax gloves on and they were soaked with blood."

As medics at a JSS, working side-by-side with Iraqi troops, they also work on people that aren't in the same uniform.

"I treated this guy. I don't remember his name, I don't really remember what he looks like, but I remember his wounds and what was going on," Lawry said. "Something in adrenaline enhances memory and when someone is bleeding in front of you, you're going to get a little spike."

Another issue medics face is the unpredictability of the situations that come up. They don't always know all of the circumstances behind every person that they come across.

"It's basically fly by the seat of your pants, moment's notice, 'Hey, we got casual-

ties coming in' and you don't really know what's going on until they're right in front of your eyes," said Spc. Andrew Demma, the senior medic at the JSS, also with 2-12th Cavalry.

A medic sees things not everyone sees, hears things not everyone hears and smells things not everyone smells.

"I'll have trouble getting to sleep and then when I finally do get to sleep I'll have a nightmare. I'll wake up and all I'll remember is seeing (what I saw), smelling that smell - that smell I get for everything. It used to be associated with just a bad smell, now it's connected to some of the things I've seen. Sometimes I'd wake up drenched in sweat," Lawry said.

Like nightmares some of the experiences can be difficult to get through, but somehow medics learn to get through them.

"If you're in a helping profession that's got to say something about the type of person you are," Demma said. "When the end result is death, it's always going to be tough, but its something you get used to."

Both agreed that it's not the first time they've seen someone die and it probably

won't be the last.

"I've ridden back to the (Treatment Medical Center) with a dead Soldier. I watched my best Army friend suffer from a chest wound on the way back to the TMC," Demma said.

"After seeing more and more things here, whether it's dead bodies out in sector, dead Soldiers, dead Iraqi soldiers, wounded Iraqi soldiers, wounded civilians, its just like everything else," the native of Springfield, Ohio added.

Gradually medics grow immune to the potentially-traumatic situations that fill their days, however, the point in which it happens is still left unknown.

"It's like any other thing in life - you get desensitized. It's something that somehow you get used to and maybe you don't get used to it, but you build some kind of emotional defense," said Demma. "Every once in a while you catch yourself thinking back after each incident (and) you just realize it's not bothering you as much. You don't dwell on it as much each time and as time goes by, you tend to do what you do and go about your business a little quicker after each incident."

In the end, the fulfillment that comes with being a medic outweighs the bad that comes hand-in-hand in the career field - even with the added horror of doing it on the battle field.

Lawry said a feeling of pride took over when a doctor told him that he saved the Soldier's life and that he should be naming his kids after him. Still, Lawry just feels that he simply did his job.

"I felt like I finally had done my job," Lawry said. "I can say I've been under fire treating a guy (and) that makes it so that people listen to you more. I feel if someone listens to you, and respects what you're saying because you've been there and you've done it, you can do your job better."

"Those nightmares - I lose a little sleep and have to change a sweaty shirt," Lawry said. "The smell - I'll get over it. If it stays with me the rest of my life, I'll get used to it."



(Photos by Spc. Jeffrey Ledesma, 1st Cav. Div. Public Affairs)

The driver of a humvee, from 2nd Battalion, 12th Cavalry Regiment, prepares to maneuver past a burning vehicle, the aftermath an improvised explosive device detonation, in Baghdad's southern Ghazaliya neighborhood April 21.