

Commitment
By Ch (COL) Larry McCarty

“They have to go through me...to get to you”

We were rolling south, a two-vehicle Military Police convoy headed from Baghdad to Babylon. We never saw the IED but O how we heard it. The improvised explosive device had been hidden behind the railing on Main Supply Route Tampa. I will never forget the explosion.

The detonation was remote controlled but the detonator’s timing was off. The majority of the explosion and shrapnel blew between the HUMVEEs. By the Grace of God there were no injuries. We kept moving until the trail vehicle began to weave out of control. We pulled through the kill zone and then stopped to assess the situation.

It was clear that the trail vehicle needed some repair. There was shrapnel damage across the front of the vehicle. However, the most significant problem was that the front driver’s side tire was shredded. The Commander called for additional security help and then we began to set up a perimeter.

As I set in the vehicle watching the events unfold I realized I could be of help. I climbed out and began to assist in the tire change. I am no mechanic; in fact I am pretty ignorant when it comes to repairing anything. However, I thought it made sense for me to step up instead of another soldier putting their weapon down and making our security weaker. You see, Chaplain’s are non-combatant’s we do not carry weapons.

As we changed the tire you could cut the tension with a knife. The team was anxious and alert anticipating a secondary attack. As I lifted the mangled tire off the rim, my hands were shaking but I was working as hard as I could. Later some of the young MPs would laugh at me and tease that I was moving faster than the best NASCAR tire changer on the planet.

One young Soldier was laid out in front of me in the prone fighting position. He had placed himself in harm’s way. He was a buffer between me and the closest village across the hardball. The Soldier could sense my fear. Our eyes met and then he spoke the words that I will never forget. This young 19-year-old private said, **“Chaplain don’t worry...they have to get through me to get to you.”** There was no doubt in my mind that this young man was willing to die for me.

Additional security arrived quickly and there was no secondary attack. The repairs were made and we continued on with the mission. But I will never forget looking into the eyes of that young Soldier. I will never forget his willingness to sacrifice for me. What commitment!

While in Iraq I was on the road from Baghdad to Babylon, and Fallujah to Najaf, from Abu Gharib to Mosul. Time and time again I was amazed at the loyalty, duty, honor, integrity and commitment of our Soldiers. It was an honor to serve with these true American heroes.