

Finding

peace

in Iraq

By John W. Kennedy

Just before the deployment of his Alaska-based airborne parachute infantry regiment to Iraq, Assemblies of God Chaplain Capt. Daniel W. Hardin learned he needed surgery to repair a torn meniscus. Hardin was disheartened when his unit, known as the Geronimos, left without him on Oct. 5, 2006.

After a couple of months of recuperation Hardin was well enough to go to Iraq. On Christmas Eve he stood in front of U.S. troops preaching and serving Communion. Twelve hours later two of the paratroopers from Hardin's forward operating base were dead. Their truck had struck an improvised explosive device (IED).

Dealing with death and its aftermath, Hardin quickly learned, was part of the assimilation process in Iraq with the 1st Battalion, 501st Parachute Infantry Regiment, 4th Brigade Combat Team (Airborne), 25th Infantry Division.

Last Feb. 4, Hardin accompanied a convoy to an outpost to conduct a worship service and offer grief counseling for a platoon that had lost a paratrooper to sniper fire.

At approximately 8:30 p.m. on a road west of Baghdad outside Fallujah, the truck in which Hardin rode struck a pressure plate detonated IED. The blast knocked the driver unconscious, wounded the front-seat passenger commander in the leg, and tore a hole in the firewall of the crew compartment — where Hardin sat.

"It felt like the right side of my face was on fire," recalls Hardin, 38.

Hardin exited the truck stunned, groping to find his way onto the nighttime roadway. Spc. Jemell Garris, an infantryman assigned to the battalion as the chaplain's assis-



Spc. Jemell Garris (right) pulled Chaplain Dan Hardin to safety.

tant — with the primary duty of providing security for the unit ministry team — found Hardin.

The 6-foot-2-inch Garris carried Hardin to a medic and returned to extract other wounded soldiers from the burning vehicle. No one died or suffered permanent injuries in the explosion, despite extensive damage to the vehicle.

Hardin suffered facial burns, eyelid and chin cuts, and a punctured outer ear. After stitches and the removal of gravel embedded in his face, he returned to his duties within three days. From outward appearances, Hardin mended quickly. But healing emotionally proved to be arduous.

THE ROAD TO RECOVERY

Suddenly the textbook theology Hardin learned in the classroom didn't jibe so smoothly with real-life experience. The nagging hurt, the shattering of his notions about God, feeling alone and helpless, and wondering what others thought of him plagued Hardin.

As the only chaplain for his base,

Hardin sensed soldiers with no faith background were checking to see if he still believed in God. Some questioned what he had done to make God so mad. Others thought if God didn't bother to protect the chaplain from harm, how could the Almighty care about the rest of them?

For the first two months after the attack, Hardin wanted to escape the war as memories of the attack loomed. Regularly he broke out in cold sweats when he heard outgoing mortar fire. Sleep did not come easily and he imagined something or someone was going to smack him in the face.

Hardin began to doubt if he had the fortitude to last as a chaplain.

Compounding Hardin's turmoil was his struggle with homesickness and news his mother had breast cancer. His workload also required him to repeatedly conduct memorials for troops killed by IEDs or sniper fire. Other duties included counseling soldiers dealing with everything from crumbling marriages to thoughts of suicide. All of it left Hardin sullen.

EMERGING

Last spring, Hardin began to emerge from the gloom enveloping him thanks in part to his wife and retired U.S. Army Col. Scott McChrystal — military representative for the Assemblies of God Chaplaincy Department.

Via e-mail, McChrystal — who spent seven years as senior chaplain at the U.S. Military Academy at West Point — persuaded Hardin to talk about the trauma with someone in person.

“People who are impacted by IEDs and live to tell about it will never forget,” says McChrystal, 58, who witnessed the horror of fellow soldiers dying from bamboo-shard booby traps as an infantry platoon leader in Vietnam. “Thank the Lord He helps in the healing process.”

Hardin laid bare his innermost thoughts with other chaplains. They told him he didn't have to put on a game face.

“I was afraid if they knew the real me with all my wounds, fears, inadequacies and sins I would be rejected,” Hardin says.

McChrystal explained to Hardin that if he didn't take care of himself,

Dan Hardin now operates the Drop Zone Café with Jemell Garris.

of lament and grief offered special consolation.

McChrystal says it's no shock that clergy in a prolonged war might be temporarily racked with disillusionment. Emotional healing is a process, and there can be times of discouragement.

“David, the warrior king after God's own heart, shows God can handle us being real and transparent about our weaknesses,” explains McChrystal.

The recovery process has reshaped Hardin's theology of pain and evil, which in turn has helped him aid others.

“God is near even when I don't sense him,” Hardin says. “He is not so much interested in keeping us from harm as He is in helping us through it.”

SEEING GOD IN THE GROUNDS

Hardin now sees how God used his knee injury in Alaska for His purpose. While recovering from surgery Hardin devised the idea of operating a free coffeehouse for soldiers in Iraq. The *Anchorage Daily News* not only agreed to send newspapers for free, but also provided a professional grade espresso machine and 100 pounds of specialty Kaladi Brothers Coffee.

Ohio District Council Presbyter Sam Kirk took the lead in rallying congregations to raise \$6,000 to sustain the supply of coffee.

The Drop Zone Café opened in March. Garris, the specialist who rescued Hardin in the IED blast, handles dispensing coffee, cappuccino, lattes and snow cones to about 55 soldiers daily.

The café has two decked-out MacBook computers, courtesy of the Apple Corporation, connected with wireless Internet. Soldiers can e-mail family, watch movies, or listen to music.

Many paratroopers who wander into the coffeehouse seek spiritual counseling or prayer, which Hardin provides. Because of the sheer number of casualties and the nature of those deaths, U.S. troops in Iraq have a heightened sense of mortality. That creates an increased receptivity to spiritual matters, and soldiers typi-



cally view a chaplain as God's representative in camp.

Ironically, Hardin believes the best part of deployment has been that he and Ann, his wife of 19 years, have grown closer. They stay connected with letters, e-mails, instant messaging and the occasional phone call (which is expensive because soldiers must pay international rates).

“It's helpful for him to have a safe place to say what he needs to say,” says Ann, 37. The couple pray for each other in their almost daily contact. Ann also mails care packages.

Still there is separation anxiety being 12 time zones away. Ann, living on the Army post, is teaching their son Matthew, 16, to drive while toilet training 3-year-old Katherine. The couple have two other children, 14-year-old Elizabeth and 12-year-old Joshua.

“I feel helpless I can't be there to support him,” Ann says. “But now I trust God more.”

If all goes as planned, Hardin should return to Fort Richardson by Christmas. However, there are no guarantees that his Iraqi stay won't be extended.

“Being here has taught me a lot about life, marriage and ministry,” Hardin says. “As long as my family can handle this vocation, I will serve as a chaplain in the Army. I was made for this.”

JOHN W. KENNEDY is news editor of *Today's Pentecostal Evangel*.

tpeextra

Express your appreciation for our soldiers on a special *Today's Pentecostal Evangel* blog. Visit tpe.ag.org and click the *Military Appreciation* blog at the top of the page.

E-mail your comments to tpe@ag.org.

ABCs OF SALVATION

To know God and be ready for heaven, follow these steps:

A. Admit you are a sinner.

“There is no one righteous, not even one ... for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God.” Romans 3:10,23 (See Romans 5:8; 6:23.)

Ask God's forgiveness and repent of your sins.

“Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved.” Romans 10:13 (See Acts 3:19.)

B. Believe in Jesus

(put your trust in Him) as your only hope of salvation.

“For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life.” John 3:16 (See John 14:6.)

Become a child of God by receiving Christ.

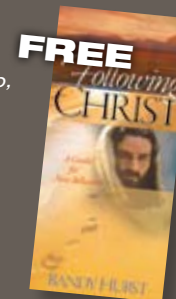
“To all who received him, to those who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God.” John 1:12 (See Revelation 3:20.)

C. Confess that Jesus is your Lord.

“If you confess with your mouth, ‘Jesus is Lord,’ and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved.”

Romans 10:9 (See verse 10.)

For further help, contact the Assemblies of God church near you.



1-800-4PRAYER

Assemblies of God National Prayer Center



Good people at work.



Classes begin January, May and August

Online Programs

Complete your college degree online in as few as 15 months by attending one of the nation's fastest-growing Christian universities. Choose:

- Liberal Arts Studies (general education courses for those with little or no college credit)
- A.A. in Early Childhood Education (Birth–Age 4)
- B.S. in Business and Professional Leadership
- B.S. in Church Leadership
- B.S. in Human Services
- M.A. in Ministerial Leadership
- Executive M.A. in Ministerial Leadership
- M.B.A.

To learn more or apply for admission, visit www.seuniversity.edu or call 800.500.8760

Lakeland, Florida

SOUTHEASTERN UNIVERSITY

Enrolled in the Spirit
Equipping for every good work.



if he didn't acknowledge his vulnerability, he would quickly burn out.

“How a chaplain recovers from psychological trauma is extremely important,” McChrystal says. “When a chaplain gets wounded, other soldiers take notice.”

Hardin sensed a renewed zeal to pray and read the Bible. The Psalms