

July 11, 2005

## Medical Field Reports From Iraq Part VI: In Season

PM Contributing Editor Leslie Sabbagh is currently on assignment in Iraq. During her tour of military medical facilities, she is filing blog entries for [popularmechanics.com](http://popularmechanics.com). To read her previous dispatches, [click here](#).



Spc. Shimkus, Pfc. Poole, Pfc. Burkman, S. Sgt. Miller, Maj. Howard.

PHOTO BY LESLIE SABBAGH

**CAMP COOKE, Taji, Iraq, July 1**--"I just didn't want to get shot." Spc. Mark Shimkus doesn't quite know what to do with all the attention that's being showered on him this morning. The accolades come with receiving two ARCOM with V-device medals (Army commendation with valor). As the 50 or so soldiers from 50th Medical Company Air Ambulance 101st Airborne Division Air Assault crowded into the conference room applaud and yell, the tall rangy young man from Chicago blushes, squirms and grins back at his buddies. Shimkus received the awards for placing himself in the line of fire to protect his flight medic and casualties while engaging AIF (anti-Iraqi Forces).

He's been with the unit since October 2001. and Maj. Bill Howard says he is one of the "most positive soldiers I've ever seen. He always has a smile on his face, nothing keeps him down. It's uplifting to see him."

Three other soldiers also have reason to grin this morning: Sgt. Marcus Miller is now a Staff Sgt., and Pvt. 2 Roger Poole and Pvt. 2 Aaron Burkman both make private first class (Pfc.).

**July 3**--"We're in season." It's a blessedly slow morning. A low, thick haze of dirt and dust grounds the medevac flights for now. Capt. Heath Holt takes the opportunity to clean his M-4, and the conversation wanders: the camaraderie of soldiers sharing the same missions; tours in Afghanistan and OIF I and II; the Huey medevac crews from Vietnam. Then the talk turns to missions flown: from the routine, an EPW (enemy prisoner of war) patient transfer to Abu Ghraib; to the intense, a hot roadside attack with mass casualties.

And just like that we're talking about Apache gunships and how much their support means to the soldiers of Eagle Dustoff--50th Medical Company's Air Ambulance 101st Airborne Division. For the insurgents, all Americans--including air medevac crews--are "in season." So all these air crews want the Apaches with them on roadsides. "They've got 30mm cannons, rockets and Hellfires," Holt says. That firepower and the knowledge that the Apache "drivers have got their six," gives the Blackhawk medevac crews less to worry about when they fly into hot PZs (pick up zones).--  
*Leslie Sabbagh*