

LOCAL CHILD RECEIVES HELP FROM US SOLDIERS

After months of discussions, a badly injured four year old boy received life changing medical treatment to enable him to walk for the first time. The boy was first noticed in May 2004 by First Infantry Division soldiers of B Company, Task Force 2-108, New York Army National Guard. While patrolling the Arab Jasim neighborhood in the Salah Ad Din Province, the soldiers were approached by the boy's mother. The child's left leg had been severely burned while he was an infant and the resulting injury and treatment by Iraqi doctors had left the upper and lower leg grafted by a sheet of skin that made the leg nearly immobile, permanently keeping the leg in a flexed position, restricting its movement.

The platoon medic, Corporal William Provost, examined the child and took some photos to bring back to Forward Operating Base O'Ryan for the Battalion surgeon to examine. The Surgeon, Colonel Russell Zelman, concluded he could not help the child with the current level of medical equipment at the Battalion Aid Station. The only alternative was the Baghdad hospital. The family was unable to afford the treatment that was needed, so it seemed that the child would remain this way for life.

Shortly afterward, B Company was relocated to a different area of operations and was unable to pursue the matter further. One month later attacks seemed to increase from the area of this tiny village. B Company was sent back into the area to quell the escalating attacks. They conducted reconnaissance, raids and searches in the area and opened lines of communication with the village leaders to try to eliminate the problem of the attacks.

Once again the child's mother asked the soldiers for help. Platoon Sergeant First Class Michael Boyer managed to get an appointment to have doctors at the Combat Support Hospital on Logistical Support Area Anaconda get involved. Colonel Malaave, a senior officer at the CSH wanted to see the child for an evaluation.

The patrol took the scared child and his relatives to the Hospital and Colonel Malaave, a plastic surgeon, was confident she could do the necessary surgery with success. The day was set for Monday 12 July 04. SFC Boyer's patrol returned the child and cousin to the village and made the arrangements to have the child, mother and the cousin picked up on Monday morning.

A few days later other platoon members picked up the child, mother and another family member and brought them to the Hospital. The mother and cousin chose to stay for the long operation. After 6 hours of surgery, the doctors had removed the skin that restricted the leg and grafted parts of skin from the other leg. The operation was a success. The prognosis was excellent and it was assured the boy would be able to learn to walk normally over time. The child would need to stay in the care of the CSH over the next 10 to 14 days.

Upon the mother's return to village she shouted with happiness to the people there, telling them the good news.

The next day the mother returned to the hospital with the soldiers and the reunion with the child was jubilant. The mother was overwhelmed with the progress the boy was making.

Over a week later it was time to discharge the little boy from the military hospital. The staff at the hospital had assembled gifts and supplies for the family. The boy had actually started to walk for the first time, albeit with some help.

The entire north section of the village appeared to be out on the streets when the patrol arrived. As the family stepped out of the military Humvee with the child, cheers rose up throughout the crowd. Everyone was clapping and singing. To add to the celebration, the platoon along with the headquarters personnel handed out treats, flipflops and soccer balls to the crowd. It was a day of celebration in the village.

The child will have to return several times to the LSAA for follow up treatment and physical therapy, but the doctors believe that he will make an excellent recovery, will be able to run and play and lead a normal life.

Although the battles wage on, an Iraqi child in need of care was made better, and a mother's hopes and dreams came true. All because a group of First Infantry National Guardsmen from northern New York felt it was important enough to make an extra effort to bring some happiness and good will to a place that knows of despair and doubt. "We can all leave this place knowing that we did something good here," says Boyer. "We made a difference in the life of a innocent child."

Written by Sergeant First Class Michael J. Boyer and Captain Edward Cappellano



The injury to Sadjed



SFC Boyer, Sadjed and his cousin and CPL Dunkley depart the village of Arab Jasim for LSAA on surgery day



The child, Sadjed and his cousin wait for his evaluation at the CSH with SFC Boyer and SSG Stephens



The child Saged with his mother and two cousins a few days after the surgery



Saged rests happily at the CSH and LSA Anaconda after the surgery that straightened his leg