

Face of Defense: Medal Recipient, VFW Member Chooses Third Iraq Tour

**By Army Staff Sgt. Jim Greenhill Special to
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CAMP TAJI, Iraq — Army Sgt. 1st Class Timothy Nein , a member of VFW Post 1170 in Middletown, Ky., didn't have to come back here. He served in Iraq twice before and was awarded a Distinguished Service Cross for his actions as a squad leader under fire. If anyone could have gotten a pass, it was Nein. But he wouldn't take it.

Army Sgt. 1st Class Timothy Nein, who is on his third deployment to Iraq, serves with the Kentucky National Guard's 223rd Military Police Company, at Camp Taji, Iraq. Nein was awarded the Distinguished Service Cross for his actions as a squad leader with the 617th Military Police Company during an ambush on March 20, 2005. Army photo by Staff Sgt. Jim Greenhill

(Click photo for screen-resolution image);high-resolution image available.

"I probably didn't have to be here this time, but I don't think that I would have missed it," Nein said. "I feel honored to be a part of this."

Nein, 39, still leads in Iraq, this time as a platoon sergeant with the Kentucky National Guard's 223rd Military Police Company, providing escorts for the 18th Military Police Brigade's Iraqi Police Transitional Team. It is his third deployment in Iraq, and his fourth overseas tour this decade. The first was in Bosnia and Herzegovina in 2001.

Nein first deployed here with the initial liberation force in 2003. But it was his second tour, in 2005, that would impact him the most. He was a squad leader with the Kentucky National Guard's 617th Military Police Company on March 20, 2005, when a convoy they were riding in was ambushed near the town of Salman Pak, south of Baghdad.

Under heavy fire, Nein and his squad put themselves and their vehicles between the insurgents and the convoy. Nein and Army National Guard Sgt. Leigh Ann Hester led a

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counterattack that saw 27 insurgents killed, seven captured and no deaths in their unit. Two soldiers were wounded.

Nein was awarded a Silver Star Medal that was upgraded to the Distinguished Service Cross. Only the Medal of Honor trumps the DSC among awards for valor in battle. Nein was the first member of the Guard to receive the award. Hester also received the Silver Star, becoming the first woman to receive the award for direct combat action.

One reason Nein wanted to return to Iraq is to continue to witness, firsthand, the dramatic changes there.

"I've seen a huge difference from 2005 to where we are now," he said. "I can remember thinking in 2005, looking back at 2003, how much different it was. I can't believe we've come as far as we have as far as getting their economy going. The violence is down greatly. It's unbelievable how much different it is."

Nein said the National Guard has played an essential role in Iraq's transformation. One example is his unit's mission.

"We're helping transform the Iraqi police to be a more relevant force and a more professional force," he said. "We're out there every day evaluating their leaders, evaluating their recruits, evaluating their police stations to make sure that they're up to par so that we can hand this mission over to them and they can take control."

From Clark County, Ind., Nein enlisted in the National Guard in 1996. "I wanted to give something back to the people that have given me so much," he said.

He has strong feelings about the Guard. "It's one of the best assets the United States Army has," he said. "It's a relevant and ready force. We have gone in the last five years from a great force to an outstanding force. We can pick up and be anywhere in the world and accomplish a mission just like any other unit in the United States and perform to the equivalent level. I can't say enough about the Guard."

Despite Nein's Guard pride, he sees all servicemembers here as a joint team. "I don't see National Guard," he said. "I don't see reserve soldiers, and I don't see active-duty soldiers, because we're all doing the same mission and we're keeping up the great professionalism ... meeting every bit of the same standards across the board."

Nein noted that the National Guard is unique because the citizen-soldier or citizen-airman balances family, a civilian career and their military service.

"We've got soldiers that aren't just soldiers -- this isn't all they've ever done," Nein said. "We

might have guys that have been in the National Guard for 20 years and have three and four deployments and have a lot of world experience, but they also have other careers that they're able to expand on in the Guard."

Nein sees the benefit of civilian-acquired skills in his own unit. "I've got guys that are in law enforcement. I've got welders. I've got college students."

Before this latest deployment, Nein took a leave of absence from the paper products company where he's worked for two decades to go full time with the Guard as a training non-commissioned officer.

Nein brings his past military and civilian experience to the table as he accomplishes his job, which includes drafting after-action reviews that seek improvement for his soldiers.

"Even if it's just a standard escort mission that we do a thousand times while we're here, every day's going to be different, and every day we've got to try and make it better, and that's how I look at every mission," he said.

Out on escort missions, Nein thinks like his enemy. "I'm looking for how, if I was a bad guy, how I would kill me the entire time out there," he said. "I'm looking for where I would put an improvised explosive device, where I would set up an ambush, and how I would do it if I was the bad guy."

He passes that mentality along to his soldiers as they scan for threats. "Don't look at the actual object," he tells them, referring to homemade bomb placements. "Look past it. Look at how you would set it up in the area -- and you'll see it way before you would if you were just looking for an inanimate object."

Nein hopes other soldiers will look for lessons in the events of the day his unit was ambushed. "What did we do right?" he said. "Why were we able to survive something that we shouldn't have been able to survive?"

"I didn't make up any of the tactics that we used. We took everything that the Army taught and that soldiers before me had used, and we developed it and we implemented it from day one," he continued. "Anytime that a technique, tactic and procedure could have been better, we worked on it."

Nein is humble about his battlefield accomplishments. "It's not what I did that made the day go right. It's what the people before me did, that taught me and mentored me on battle tactics and TTPs and just doing the right thing each and every day. Because if you do that -- the right training, the right leadership and the right equipment -- there's nothing that we can't accomplish."

March 20, 2005, might have ended differently for Nein and his squad, who were outnumbered five to one. Every day he serves here, Nein still faces risk.

"This is my job," he said. "This is what I chose to do, and it's what I'll continue to strive to do. I love what I do."

(Army Staff Sgt. Jim Greenhill works for the Army News Service.)