

Body armor keeps Marines safe in Habbaniyah

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Pfc. Joshua Hanson, from Forks, Wash., a scout with D Company, 3rd Light Armored Reconnaissance Battalion, was shot in the chest by a sniper while on patrol in Habbaniya, but the small-arms protective insert prevented the round from seriously injuring him.

HABBANIYAH, Iraq (June 12, 2006) -- The enemy snipers hit their targets- but it yielded them no results.

In less than a week's time, Sgt. Joshua S. Adams and Pfc. Jason Hanson, of D Company, 3rd Light Armored Reconnaissance Battalion were hit by sniper shots. But the enemy had little effect because both were left with only minor injuries thanks to their small-arms protective inserts, or SAPI, plates.

While working in support of 3rd Battalion, 5th Marine Regiment, to complete counterinsurgency and humanitarian operations in the town of Habbaniyah, Hanson was the lead man on a patrol looking for roadside bombs on the main highway when a sniper shot him in the chest.

"I was checking my side and when I looked forward, I got shot -- it knocked me down," said Hanson, 21, a scout from Forks, Wash.

"I saw him on the ground, ran up to him and rolled him over," said the on-scene corpsman Seaman Chad T. Kenyon, 20, from Tucson, Ariz. "I saw that the round had gone through the front of his flak, so I opened up his flak and saw no bleeding. Then he looked up at me and said 'I'm fine, Doc.'"

The 7.62 mm bullet went through Hanson's rifle but was stopped by the Marine's SAPI plate, leaving him with some bruising on his chest. But it could have been a lot worse.

"The round definitely would have hit him in the diaphragm, which is a muscle that assists in breathing," said Petty Officer 3rd Class Jose Mata Jr., 26, the company's senior corpsman from Hialeah, Fla. "It's not a good day when that happens because

he probably wouldn't have lived."

A few days later, Adams, a vehicle commander from Bowling Green, Mo., was shot while cordoning off an area after discovering an improvised explosive device.

"We were blocking off a road and one car pulled up from a side street, and the guy in the back of vehicle started moving around to face us," said Lance Cpl. Kyle V. Lyons, a 25-year-old LAV gunner from Houston. "I was telling Sgt. Adams, he got hit. He dropped down and then said he was fine."

"My gunner took over while I assessed my wounds and pulled some shrapnel out of my arm-then we chased down the car," said Adams, 21. "The round went into my SAPI but when it hit, the round shattered and some of it went into my wrist."

The vehicle was chased down and two men were detained.

"The round would have hit him in the liver, causing massive internal damage," Mata said. "It could have been bad. The SAPI plates did their job."

Bulky, heavy and hot in the already soaring temperatures, Hanson said he's got a different perspective on the ceramic plates he's toting around his body.

"I'm happy to carry the extra weight," Hanson said.

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Pfc. Joshua Hanson, from Forks, Wash., a scout with D Company, 3rd Light Armored Reconnaissance Battalion, was shot in the chest by a sniper while on patrol in Habbaniya, but the small-arms protective insert prevented the round from seriously injuring him. Photo by: Cpl. Graham A. Paulsgrove



Sgt. Joshua S. Adams, a vehicle commander from Bowling Green, Mo., with D Company, 3rd Light Armored Reconnaissance Battalion, was shot in the chest by a sniper while operating in Habbaniya, but the small-arms protective insert prevented the round from seriously injuring him. Photo by: Cpl. Graham A. Paulsgrove