

## IN MEMORIAM

# Illinoisan was at the controls when he died

By Lisa Kernek, staff writer

The Illinois National Guard on Monday identified the helicopter pilot killed Sunday in Iraq as 1st Lt. Brian Slavenas of Genoa.

Slavenas, 30, belonged to Company F of the First Battalion of the 106th Aviation Battalion based at the Greater Peoria Regional Airport.

He was one of 16 soldiers killed when an anti-aircraft missile struck down the CH-47 Chinook helicopter he was flying near Fallujah. The attack wounded 20.

During a news conference at Camp Lincoln in Springfield, Brig. Gen. Randal Thomas, adjutant general of the Illinois National Guard, credited Slavenas with saving lives.

"We're thankful that a number of those individuals survived that crash," Thomas said. "It would be speculative to say that the pilot did his job and got that aircraft down and saved lives, but I'd sure like to believe that."

The helicopter was traveling at about 150 mph about 200 feet off the ground, when it was shot down, Thomas said.

A Chinook has a troop capacity of 36, a Guard spokesman said.

Slavenas was part of a five-person crew transporting soldiers to Baghdad so they could return to the United States for a rest and recuperation leave, the Pentagon said.

The other four members of the crew - a second pilot and three machine-gunners - serve with a Davenport, Iowa, detachment of the Peoria-based

company in which Slavenas served, Thomas said.

No other Illinoisans were known to have been injured in the attack, Illinois National Guard officials said.

Slavenas' helicopter was one of two Chinooks from the 106th Aviation that were transporting troops, Thomas said. The unit has 14 Chinooks in Iraq - seven from Peoria and seven from Davenport, he said.

Slavenas was an active-duty member of the Army from 1991 to 1995 and joined the Guard in 1995, Thomas said. He had been a pilot since 2002 and had been in Iraq since April.

He came from a family with a history of military service - his father was a paratrooper, one of his brothers fought in Grenada, and the other served in Desert Storm.

So going into the military was a natural path for Slavenas, even if it didn't fit his personality.

"He wasn't one of those gung-ho, want-to-go-to-war type guys. He was there to do a job," said his brother, Eric Slavenas, who served in Grenada with the U.S. Army.

Brian Slavenas stood 6 feet, 5 inches tall and weighed nearly 230 pounds but was a "gentle giant," according to family. The 30-year-old competed in weightlifting competitions and played the piano beautifully, his father, Ronald Slavenas, said Monday from his home in Genoa - a town of about 4,300 in northern Illinois.

"He was kind of a quiet person who had a circle of friends but wasn't the

rah-rah type of guy who did all kinds of drinking and stuff like that, because he didn't like violence and destruction," Ronald Slavenas said.

He wasn't eager to go to the Middle East when he left in April, either, family members said. He had just graduated from the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign with an engineering degree and was looking forward to starting his career.

Nevertheless, he felt obliged to serve his country.

"He wasn't keen on the idea, but he said, 'Once you're in, you can't cop out,'" Ronald Slavenas said.

Besides his two brothers and father, he is survived by his mother, a stepmother and a stepbrother and stepsister.

He was the third combat death for the Illinois National Guard this year.

Staff Sgt. Jacob Frazier of St. Charles died in March in Afghanistan when a convoy he was riding in was attacked. Frazier was a tactical air command and control specialist with the 169th Air Support Operations Squadron of the 182nd Airlift Wing based in Peoria.

Spc. Brandon Ramsey of Calumet City died in August of injuries suffered in Iraq when his vehicle rolled over while chasing a suspicious vehicle. Ramsey served with the 933rd Military Police Company based in Chicago.

The Associated Press contributed to this report. Lisa Kernek can be reached at 788-1459 or [lisa.kernek@sj-r.com](mailto:lisa.kernek@sj-r.com).



The proud warriors of Baker Company wanted to do something to pay tribute to our fallen comrades. So since we are part of the only Infantry Battalion left in Iraq, the one way that we could think of doing that is by taking a picture of Baker Company saying the way we feel. It would be awesome if you could find a way to share this with our fellow countrymen. I was wondering if there was any way to get this into your papers to let the world know that "WE HAVE NOT FORGOTTEN" and are proud of our country.

# ILLINOIS MILITARY POLICE GUARDSMAN AWARDED BRONZE STAR MEDAL

By Stacey Rieger, Illinois National Guard Public Affairs Office

CHICAGO, Ill. - Spc. James Dexter's combination of civilian experience as a volunteer firefighter, military training and personal courage resulted in the Illinois Army National Guard military policeman receiving the Bronze Star for his service in Iraq.

Dexter, of Bartlett, Ill., was awarded the Bronze Star Medal in August for repeated acts of meritorious service above and beyond the call of duty while serving with the 933rd Military Police Co. while deployed to Iraq in support of Operation Iraqi Freedom. Dexter received the award for his quick thinking and prompt action on three separate occasions, in saving the life of fellow U.S. soldier and an Iraqi civilian and preventing the destruction of critical vehicle parts from a burning 2 1/2 ton truck.

In May of this year, Dexter's team responded to a civilian traffic accident in which two Iraqi civilians were critically hurt, one with a life-threatening head injury. Dexter performed triage, called a medical helicopter and treated the Iraqis until it arrived. Army physicians with the 86th Combat Support Hospital later informed his command that Dexter's actions as a first responder stabilized the Iraqi patient with the head injury long enough for them to save the patient's life. During another traffic accident later in the month, three U.S. soldiers were critically injured and Dexter used his medical skills to treat the injured. After the casualties were evacuated, Dexter remained on the scene operating a traffic control post for more than four hours. The responding army surgical evacuation team later informed his command that Dexter stabilized one of the soldiers long enough for Army physicians to save his life.

Again in May, Dexter's team responded to a burning 2 1/2 ton truck containing critical engine parts. According to Cpt. Todd Pentecost, commander of the 933rd MP Co., Dexter leapt atop the burning truck and offloaded most of the equipment in the midst of exploding batteries and boiling and popping engine dye. Relying on his experience as a fireman, Dexter then directed the transportation

company and military police soldiers in taking immediate actions to extinguish the fire with sand, fire extinguishers and water. As a direct result of his efforts, the truck and most of the equipment were saved from destruction. Dexter suffered burns to his hands and face

week he commented that it had been an honor and a privilege to be present to watch me receive my award," Dexter said. "To know that men who live the life of a soldier everyday, some former U.S. Army Rangers and combat veterans of different operations feel that I am deserving of this great honor says more than any medal that will ever hang on my uniform."

Pentecost echoed the sentiment and credits Dexter's civilian training as an emergency medical technician and firefighter as key components in saving the lives those injured.

"This is what we (the National Guard) bring to the battlefield," said Pentecost. "It's the civilian experience along with the military experience that makes the National Guard soldier such an asset."

While serving in Operation Iraqi Freedom, members of the 933rd MP Co. are assigned to the 504th Military Police Battalion, active component out of Fort Lewis, WA. The 504th MP BN is assigned to the 220th Military Police

Brigade, United States Army Reserve, the theater military police brigade that is assigned to the 377th Theater Support Command, which supports the entire theater of operations.

Dexter is the first junior enlisted soldier in the 377th Theater Support Command to receive the Bronze Star during Operation Iraqi Freedom. The 377th TSC includes about 5,000 military police soldiers.

One way a soldier becomes eligible for the Bronze Star Medal is by distinguishing him or herself while engaged in military operations involving conflict with an opposing foreign force. It could be considered to be the wartime equivalent of the Meritorious Service Medal. A soldier who earns the Bronze Star Medal for heroic action is also awarded the medal with a "V" device for valor.

"Dexter accepted responsibilities and acted in a manner well beyond his current rank. His skill, bravery and expertise were key in saving the lives of both an Iraqi civilian and a U.S. soldier, and in preventing the destruction of critical U.S. Army equipment," said Pentecost. "He is the quintessential citizen soldier and a credit to the Military Police Corps."



**Lt. Col. Thomas H. Tatum, Commander, 504th MP Battalion, pins the Bronze Star award on Spc. James Dexter, 933rd MP Company for repeated acts of meritorious service during Operation Iraqi Freedom.**

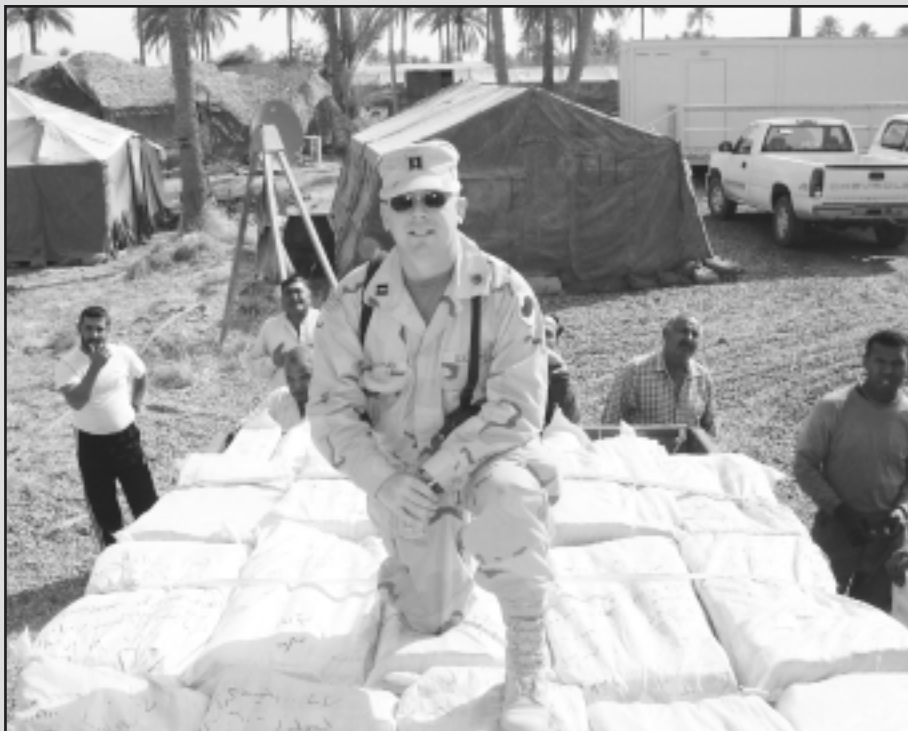
while directing the fire rescue.

"It was very important to me as a commander to recognize outstanding soldiers and thus I think that it is wonderful that Specialist Dexter received the Bronze Star," said Pentecost. "The award reflects distinction not only on himself, but the entire unit. Like our active component counterparts, we have made many sacrifices to be here, but we have an additional layer of sacrifice, which stems from the fact that we are not full-time soldiers. We remain, however, members of a professional military and contribute just as much as active component soldiers. Being able to present one of our soldiers with this award made me very proud, of him, our unit and the National Guard."

Dexter is a sophomore at Western Illinois University in Macomb, Ill., and volunteer firefighter with the Emmet-Chalmers Volunteer Fire Department. He credits his civilian experience as an emergency medical technician and his training as a combat lifesaver with being able to provide medical attention properly at critical moments. Dexter feels it is great honor to have received this award.

"I feel that it is absolutely incredible. An E-7 from battalion came down for my pinning and when I saw him later in the

# Boardmember Ben Shakman Reports from Iraq



Looking back through my emails, I discovered that it has been about five weeks since I last wrote an email to everyone. Today is shaping up to be a slow day, so I decided that it was time to sit down and put some more thoughts and observations into an email. The past five weeks have been something of a blur. There are certain events and experiences that stand out and I'll attempt to hit a few of the highlights here.

First of all, the weather. Fall in Iraq is a different interpretation of the season than it is at home. There are palm trees and they seem to stay the same shades of brown and green all year long. There are also some small bushes outside of my office and they've looked like they were dead ever since I arrived. The first day we had any rain it was only a light sprinkle that lasted for about an hour, yet it was enough to cause the bushes to sprout leaves. There have been a few other days that we have had rain including one real toad-choker about two weeks ago. That was a serious storm! It was very windy all day and the air was filled with dust and dirt that reduced visibility to about a mile at the best of times. This is a tremendous departure from the summer because there were weeks that went by that we never even saw a cloud and the visibility was unlimited. The wind blew so strongly that day that it tore the door off of the building where I work and brought down the plastic sheeting that covered the window openings (the windows were stolen, along with the light fixtures, doors, and

even the plumbing during the looting back in the spring). Everything wound up coated in sand and a very fine dust. During the evening it started to rain and it turned into a real storm, complete with thunder and lightning. Our entire camp turned into a mud pit and it was about a week later that it finally dried up.

The other thing about the weather is that it has turned cold here. We were accustomed to daytime highs in the 100-110 range for a while and it was getting to be very comfortable. Over a period of about two weeks, the weather changed significantly and now our daytime highs are in the 60-75 range and it gets down into the low-40s at night. That would be a perfectly comfortable temperature if we had heated tents; unfortunately that is not the case. The contractors brought in some electric space heaters (they resemble radiators and are not very effective) about the time that the weather started to change. They are enough to keep the tents a little bit warmer than the outside air, but not much. The other issue with the heaters is that the Polish immediately assumed that they were for them and not for everyone else—that caused some excitement.

Another event that occurred since my last update is that the first one of my friends redeployed. Pablo Van Den Ven is an Apache pilot who worked in the G-3 Aviation Cell and a good friend of mine. The Dutch Air Force only deploys their people for a short period of time and his three months were up. I used to

joke with him that for as long as he lived in Texas (four years on assignment) and since his name was Pablo that he was really a Mexican masquerading as a Dutchman. He was a good guy and I hope that our paths cross again. It is interesting to think that the 11 of us are the only ones in the division who will spend an entire year here. Over the coming months, I will see a lot of people come and go.

Also worth mentioning is that our coalition is now up to 23 nations. This is due to the addition of the South Koreans. More accurately, the South Korean—we only have one. Nonetheless, it means that we have another nation represented in our organization. I saw on the AP website that there are 34 nations with troops deployed in Iraq. We have the vast majority of those nations, if not their soldiers, living and working here.

I've also been involved in the planning process for the establishment of some base morale, welfare, and recreation facilities. The US does not consider this a "fixed" location so there are some serious limitations on what we can build. That fact notwithstanding, I had the opportunity to lead the staff planning process on how we would spend about \$400,000 in US funds on the various base camps in the MND-CS area of responsibility. It was very interesting for me to work with people from so many different nations towards the same goal. It was also interesting to see the different priorities that their soldiers put on fitness and recreation. In the end, we settled on a good sized fitness facility and a separate internet café/phone bank as the biggest emphasis. Secondary consideration will go to game/recreation rooms and to big-screen TVs to show movies.

In my actual area of responsibility, I conducted a two-day training seminar for the additional duty officers who are responsible for detainee operations down in the brigades. It was a very productive session and the results thus far have been extremely favorable. My next area of emphasis is to revise our standard operating procedures and make them more streamlined. I also must prepare an action plan to make sure that I'm not starting from scratch when the new rotations arrive. The Spanish are the first to rotate and they are leaving in early December. After them, it will be the Polish and the Ukrainians. By the end of February, only us Americans will be left from when the mission began.

My sincere hope is that the new rotations come in with a more aggressive approach to the mission. Our current division commander seems to be more