

CHARLES EGERSTROM



Charles Blake Egerstrom was raised in the Willmar area and graduated from Willmar High School in 1997. After High School, Chuck worked and went to college in the area but eventually wanted to do something different. On 2 November 2000 he enlisted in the US Army in Souix Falls South Dakota. The Army had become a family tradition and he decided to carry on that tradition. Because of his prior college credits, Chuck was set to enter the Army as an E-2. He had an opportunity to take an Army Physical Fitness test for further promotion which he passed, and brought him to the Rank of E-3 upon enlistment.

Egerstrom was sent to Fort Benning Georgia for Basic Training in Charlie Company, 3rd Battalion, 47th Infantry. He had tried to prepare himself both physically and mentally for the trials of basic, this preparation helped him. Chuck says that at times it wasn't that bad, but at other times it was really tough, especially the mental training. Later in his career, Chuck noticed a difference between the graduates of Benning from those that graduated from another place. He says that they tended to dominate many of the Physical Fitness Tests and other activities. Not all, but many of the men Chuck knew from Benning, did better, which he believes was because of those experiences at Fort Benning. Charles was the Assistant Platoon Leader while at basic. Egerstrom graduated from basic training on 1 February 2001.



Drill Sergeant Jerry Charles



SFC Felix

After basic training Charles was sent to Fort Sam Houston Texas for Advanced Individual Training (AIT). He reported on 12 February 2001. He was training to become a Medical Specialist. Charles was already nationally registered as an EMT, so his 12 weeks at Fort Sam was fairly easy. He really only had to do the Physical Training. For the Classroom Exercises, Egerstrom was assigned to be a Class Leader, helping the instructors in the classroom. He was also assigned to Squad Leader and Assistant Platoon Leader while at AIT. On 20 April 2001, Charles graduated from Fort Sam Houston as a 91 Bravo (91B), Medical Specialist.



E-3 Charles Egerstrom after training

After AIT, Egerstrom went back to Fort Benning for Airborne Jump School. He went through the training completing the first jump on 3 June 2001. His second jump was practicing a Combat Jump on 4 June.



He was in full gear with his primary and reserve parachutes. After jumping from the plane, he dropped his lowering line, which dropped some of his equipment below him, but still kept it attached for easy retrieval once on the ground. His lowering line dropped and hit his foot, sending him off center in the air. When Egerstrom hit the ground, he landed off kilter and broke his leg on the jump. He was given a medical drop from the Airborne program.

On 7 August 2001, he reported for duty at Fort Hood Texas. His first duty assignment was with HHB (Headquarters and Headquarters Battery), Divarty (Division Artillery), 4th ID (Infantry Division) at Fort Hood. He was assigned to the Division Artillery aid station as a Medical Specialist. Later he was tasked out to the Thomas Moore Health Clinic as an Immunizations Specialist as BMM (Borrowed Military Manpower).

Chuck's duties while in HHB at Fort Hood were to be the direct supervisor to two other soldiers. He also was responsible for the accountability and maintenance of two military vehicles, M997 & M1078A, along with other equipment. He provided emergency and routine medical treatment in both garrison and field exercises. Egerstrom also updated and maintained medical records and was accountable for and ordered supplies for the garrison and field exercises.

He completed Defensive Driving Course 2 on 15 August 2001. He began Vehicle Operator training, driver course, shortly after. He graduated from Vehicle Operator Training on 11 September 2001 at Fort Hood Texas.

The September 11th attacks caused the post to be locked down. Prior to 11 September, Fort Hood was an open Post. After the attacks, security became very tight. He even heard about waits of 4-6 hours for vehicle searches before being allowed on base. the added security didn't change things much for Chuck, but it could be felt all over the base.



Chuck's Army Woodland Army Battle Dress Uniform. Donated by himself 30 August 2007.

On 14 September 2001 Charles was sent to field training in support of “Ironhorse Fighter”, phase II of the Division Capstone exercise. He served as a medic to HHB divarty. He stayed in the field until 11 October after which he received a Certificate of Achievement for his duties in “Ironhorse Fighter”.

On 8 April 2002 he received another Certificate of Achievement for support operations with the 3rd Battalion, 16 Field Artillery in the field. On 26 July he was recertified as a Nationally Registered EMT Basic (NR-EMT-B).

On 15 October 2002 he was sent to National Training Center at Fort Irwin California. There Charles was selected as the Divarty Command Sergeant Major’s driver for his duty at the National Training Center. The Command Sergeant Major was James Sherrill. This is a task that he continued, even during his deployment. He was promoted to Specialist (E-4) on 2 November 2002.



Charles was deployed to Iraq for Operation Iraqi Freedom in March 2003. He left the United States on 19 March 2003 and arrived in Kuwait on 20 March 2003.

The first few weeks in country were spent preparing personel and equipment for the move into combat. All the vehicles and much of their equipment was brought over aboard ship and had to be unloaded and processed in.

After some time spent going through this process, they were ready for the move into Iraq, and into a combat zone.

On a regular day, Charles would wear is DCU’s (Desert Combat Uniform), helmet, desert boots, Interceptor Body Armor (IBA), along with ammunition pouches that attached to the IBA vest. In the field he also carried his Aid Pack, besides always carrying his weapon.

His first impression of Iraq was; "Wow, the heat." The temperatures in Iraq could exceed 130 degrees during the day. After getting over the heat change, Chuck really started to notice the difference in living. Barbed wire, sandbags, and guards made up most of his first sights of the country. The area he was based in was heavily guarded. He participated in Task Force Gunner operations. He helped with cordon and search, raid, presence patrols and checkpoint operations. He was awarded the Army Commendation medal with "V" device for Valor for his actions during these duties from 19 March to 31 May 2003. According to the citation, he performed over 25 searches including vehicles which almost always produced weapons. He also came under small arms fire on six occasions.



Chuck notes that those missions could be difficult at times. On these missions they always had to be ready to expect fire or hostilities from the people that they came up against. Holding their weapons at the ready. At times, however, the people they came into contact with were friendlies, not enemy, and holding your weapon on someone that isn't there to hurt you, even for a second, can be hard.



Chuck's Desert Cammo BDU and Iraqi Money from his first tour of duty - Donated by himself

On 10 April Egerstrom recalls watching the insurgents “walk” mortar rounds into their position. He and another man stood and watched them come in, at first trying to figure out what was going on. They soon realized what it was, but after just a few rounds, American artillery fired at the insurgents, and the attack ended.

As a Medical Specialist, Chuck was tasked to assist with mass casualty incidents providing treatment to casualties and evacuation as needed. He recalls three or four times that they had mass casualties. The largest number of casualties that he remembers at one time was 32. He also helped with basic first aid and taught combat life saving classes.



Charles also served on convoys, driving, preparing missions, maintaining the vehicle and equipment, and perpetration of convoy team. On 22 September 2003 while on a convoy, Chuck was hit by an IED (improvised explosive device). He had volunteered to take the place of another soldier who was going on leave in a couple of days. He

was driving in the second vehicle of a three vehicle convoy. Suddenly an explosion rang out and all they saw was a big cloud of sand and smoke. Although the explosion went off right in front of his vehicle, Chuck’s first instinct was to “hold straight and go.” He punched the accelerator down and took off. After going down the road, they turned around and went back to secure the area. At the scene of the explosion they began to take enemy fire, but it soon ended. The blast had blown Chuck’s ear drum on his left side, causing permanent hearing damage. Chuck says that the other injuries, minor nicks and scratches, were of no concern though. Chuck was awarded the Purple Heart for the injuries sustained in the blast. Shortly after the attack, Chuck’s boss came out to the scene, alone, to

check on them. No less than three vehicles were allowed to leave the base.



Damage sustained to Chuck’s Humvee during an IED attack on 22 September 2003. Chuck earned the Purple Heart.



Photos of the bomb crater from the IED blast of 22 September 2003. The attack was followed by enemy fire.



Combat activity in Iraq was fairly hit and miss in Chuck's experiences. There were times that they would be under attack about four times a week, then other times that they wouldn't see or hear anything for weeks on end.

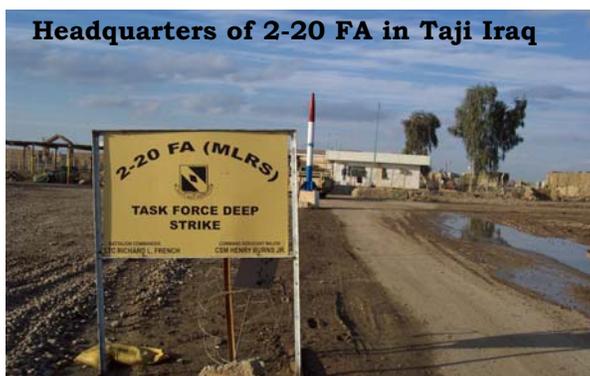
Egerstrom's unit didn't lose anyone in combat, but there were men that Chuck knew that were lost. On 14 January 2004, two men that Charles knew from convoy missions died in a roadside bombing. Specialist Larry E. Polley and Sergeant Edmond L. Randle died in that attack north of Taji Iraq. They were searching and clearing IED's when one went off by them and overturned the Bradley Fighting Vehicle they were in. The blast blew the turret from the vehicle 15 feet away. The men served with the 2nd Battalion, 20th Field Artillery Regiment, the Black Knights.



Larry E Polley



Edmond L Randle



Headquarters of 2-20 FA in Taji Iraq



Private Rasheed Sahib and the memorial made for him in Iraq.

Private Rasheed Sahib from the 20th Field Artillery was another loss in Iraq. Sahib was hit in the chest when another soldier's weapon discharged while it was being cleaned. He was killed on 18 May 2003.



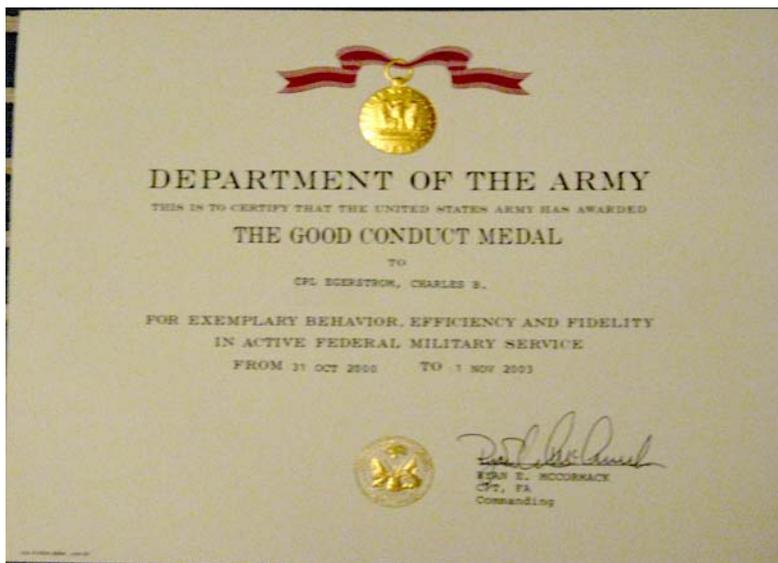
Other men with an association to Charles and his unit were killed in Iraq, but none of the ones that Charles had direct day to day ties with.

On 13 December 2003, half a world away, Americans watched on television the announcement by Paul Bremer of, "Ladies and Gentlemen, we got him." Members of the 4th Infantry Division found Saddam Hussein in a "Spider Hole" near Tikrit Iraq. The men that caught him were from the 4th Battalion, 42 Field Artillery Regiment, 4th Infantry Division.

Egerstrom's unit was serving as the Battalion headquarters for the men of the 4-42nd FA. Chuck was about 60 miles south of the position that Saddam was found in. Within a few days, Chuck was able to go up to the location and he along with other members of his unit got to see first hand the "Spider Hole" and the area that Saddam was hiding in.



Members of the 4-42nd FA pull Iraqi dictator Saddam Hussein from hiding on 13 December 2003. Days later Chuck got to tour the hole (left).



On 1 November 2003, Charles was awarded the Army Good Conduct Medal. The citation reads; "For exemplary behavior, efficiency, and fidelity in active military service from 31 October 2000 to 1 November 2003".



Christmas Eve 2003



Christmas Day 2003

Not all of the time Charles spent in Iraq was all war and combat. They did get to kick back and relax a little. On Christmas Eve 2003, they donned their holiday gear to pose for a Christmas photo (right). On Christmas day they found a Christmas tree in the desert to take a photo by in full battle dress. Even with Christmas, there was a noticeable lack of snow at Taji in the desert of Iraq.



On 20 January 2004 the Commanding General of the 4th Infantry Division came to Egerstrom's unit while they hosted a Boxing Smoker. The General was Raymond T. Odierno. Charles wanted to get a photo with the General, but was reluctant to ask. Chuck's boss noticed this and called to the General and said that "one of my guys wants a picture." Charles was able to get his photo taken with the Division Commander. Gen Odierno was later promoted to Assistant Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff.



This father & son had not seen each other in years while they both served in the Army. During the war in Iraq, they were reunited, at least for a while.

At night in Iraq, Chuck would watch the city's power go out, every night. The whole city would just go dark, no more power left to light the whole city. As his deployment went on, the lights stayed on longer and longer into the night, until eventually they stayed on. This showed Charles that what the Americans were doing there was doing some good.

Throughout Chuck's time in Iraq, he says that he noticed a large variety of things that we were doing in the country to help improve it after the invasion. He saw the building of roads and bridges for the infrastructure. He watched kids go to school, possibly some kids that never had gone to school before.

Rocket sticking out of the ground near Taji Iraq. Chuck saw this sight during his tour in Iraq in 2003-2004. Luckily this rocket was a dud did not detonate.

The reality is this rocket was put in the ground by American Soldiers. Army Explosive Ordnance Disposal personel disarmed the rocket and decided to bury it partially out of the ground as kind of a "sight to see" in Taji.



Egerstrom watched a variety of helicopters come into Iraq. He always had a love of aviation and helicopters.



Charles shaking hands with newly promoted 1st Lt. Pope. Charles had become friends with this man while overseas. The last time Charles saw Pope, he was a Captain.

On 28 February 2004, Chuck returned from his tour of duty in Iraq. He returned to Fort Hood Texas. For Chuck's tour of duty in Iraq he was awarded the Bronze Star medal, Purple Heart medal, Army Commendation with "V" (Valor) device, the Global War on Terror Service medal and the Global War on Terror Expeditionary medal.



Memorial at Fort Hood Texas dedicated to the memory of the men lost in combat in Operation Iraqi Freedom.



Upon their return, MSG Phillips wanted a photo with Charles since he had earned so many medals.



Charles with his mother, Sharon Skaro, after returning from his deployment to Iraq. Sharon has been an officer of the local Blue Star Mothers of America Chapter 1. The Welcome Home ceremony was held on 22 April 2004 at Fort Hood Texas.

On 1 May 2004 Charles was promoted to the rank of Corporal.

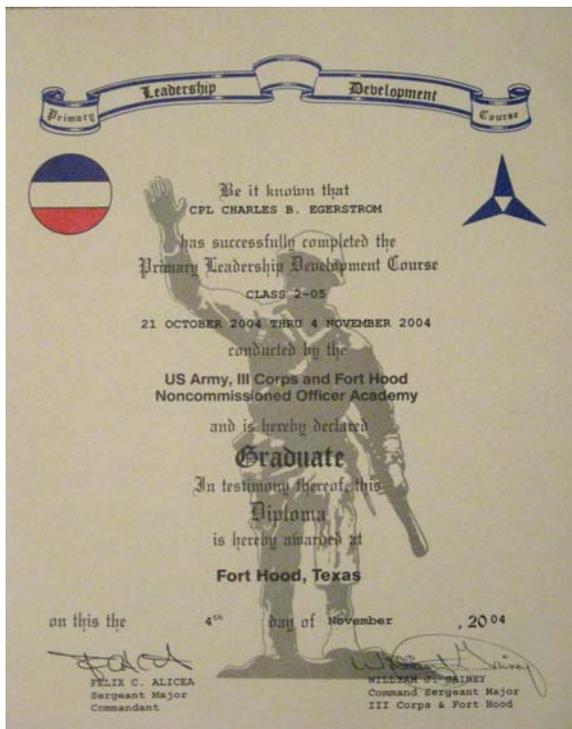
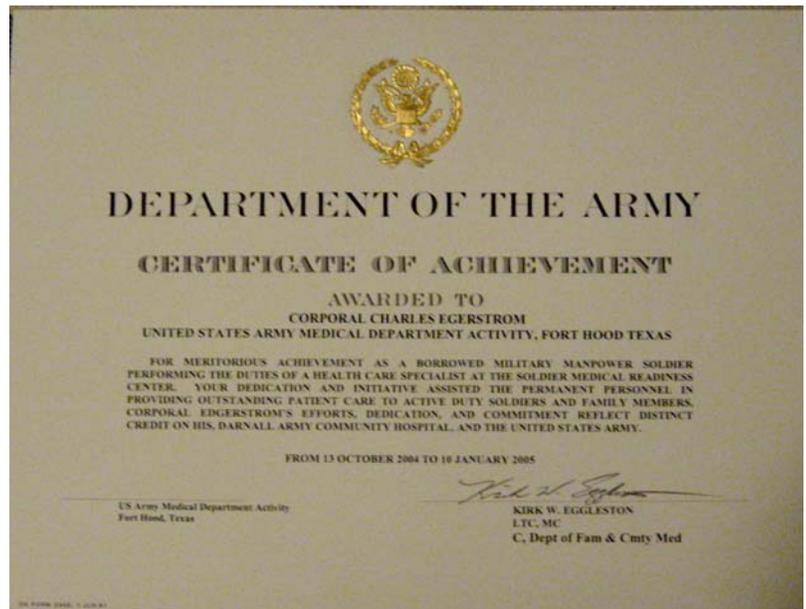
After his return from Iraq, Egerstrom continued to serve at HHB in Fort Hood Texas.

On 22 August 2004, Charles was officially discharged from the United States Army to re-enlist on 23 August. The event was captured in a small outdoor ceremony at Fort Hood.



In October 2004, Egerstrom was again tasked out as BMM (Borrowed Military Manpower) to Darnall Army Community Hospital at Fort Hood Texas. He served there until 10 January 2005. While there he helped the permanent medical personnel provide care to military personnel and their families. He was awarded a Certificate of Achievement (left) for his work there.

Egerstrom was also sent to PLDC (Primary Leadership Development Course) at Fort Hood in October 2004. He was a member of Class 2-05 beginning training on 21 October 2004. He served as Squad Leader while at PLDC. He graduated on 2 November 2004. This course allowed him the possibility of promotion.



On 1 March 2005 Charles Egerstrom was promoted to the rank of Sergeant E-5.

In mid 2005, Charles started his second duty assignment. He was assigned to HHS (Headquarters & Headquarters Service) 2nd Battalion, 20th Field Artillery, at Fort Hood. He served as a 68W, Health Care Specialist. He also served as the



**Promotion to Sergeant at Fort Hood
 1 March 2005**



Evacuation NCO and the Medical Specialist NCO. One duty Charles was assigned to was to be in charge of the Battalion's Combat Life Saver Program. His accomplishment was that he brought the battalion from a 20% to a 94% rating of certified combat life savers.



Egerstrom in Department of the Army Photo as Sergeant taken 19 May 2005.

Egerstrom also served as the NonCommissioned Officer in Charge of the battalion aid station operations. He maintained accountability of all the assigned equipment. He was also the Hearing Conservation NCO, Field Sanitation NCO, and Squad Leader in charge of medical training, combat training, and the mentoring of 7 soldiers.



On 29 August 2005 the Gulf Coast of the United States was hit by Hurricane Katrina. The storm devastated parts of Louisiana and Mississippi. Members of the US Army were dispatched to help in the relief efforts. Second Battalion, 20th Field Artillery volunteered some of their men for the effort. Charles was one of those volunteered. In September 2005 he was deployed to Baton Rouge Louisiana.

Baton Rouge Louisiana from the air after Hurricane Katrina (above). Waking up their first morning in Baton Rouge (right). Charles received beads left over from Mardi Gras from a local as a thank you for what they were doing to help the relief effort (below).



Charles served as Squad Leader in charge of five other medics and equipment. They arrived to provide medical support, relief and evacuation to hurricane Katrina victims, rescue workers and soldiers.

For his work in Louisiana, Egerstrom was awarded the Sikorsky Aircraft Rescue Award and the Humanitarian Service Medal.

After his deployment to the Gulf Coast for hurricane relief, Charles returned to Fort Hood Texas to prepare to deploy to Iraq once again. He did get a brief chance to make a return visit home to Willmar, have an early Thanksgiving, and head back to Hood to deploy.





On 31 November 2005 Charles was redeployed to Iraq with Alpha Battery, Second Battalion, 20th Field Artillery, Fourth Infantry Division.

The group first landed in Kuwait on 1 December 2005. Again, as with his first deployment, vehicles and equipment would have to be unloaded and prepared before they would be able to go into Iraq.

Charles was assigned detail to help with the unloading process in Kuwait. He helped by driving the vehicles off the ship and bringing them up to their area to prepare for the move into Iraq.

They also performed a live fire exercise with their rocket system while in Kuwait. Charles and the men also fired their rifles at the range and continued with their Physical Fitness training and other preparation and training.

After staying at Kuwait for about three weeks, the men of the 2-20 were sent to the Al Anbar Province in western Iraq. They were a Forward Deployed Multiple Launch rocket Systems Battery. They were to be positioned in the vicinity of Ramadi and Fallujah Iraq.

Egerstrom remembers having Christmas breakfast in Al Taqqadum (TQ) en route to their destination at Camp Wolf. That night, he had dinner at Al Asad. He stayed at Al Asad that night. He says that it was one of the most uncomfortable nights of sleep he has had. They slept in a transient building, and he stayed on a broken cot, half of it sat up in the air. The building's lights stayed on until they figured out how to get them off around 3am. The following morning, they continued their trek into Iraq and up to Camp Wolf.

Camp Wolf was located just off of the Syrian Border. They were there to replace an Army Field Artillery unit from Fort Sill. They stayed in old beat up billets that were once used by the Iraqi Army.

Most of the time spent at Camp Wolf, they did presence patrols and were on stand by for missions. Chuck says that the biggest thing that they had to fight at Wolf was boredom.





While at Camp Wolf, Chuck did have a day of activity. One member had a medical emergency and had to be medically evacuated. The man was put on a litter, and carried out to a waiting helicopter. Charles went out to the flight line to brief the waiting medical personnel on the chopper.

During his second tour of duty, no men were lost to combat. There were a couple of men that left due to other health issues, but none to combat.



Outside Camp Wolf, the Army burned scrap and garbage, things that were not needed anymore. On one such occasion, Charles used it as a photo opportunity.

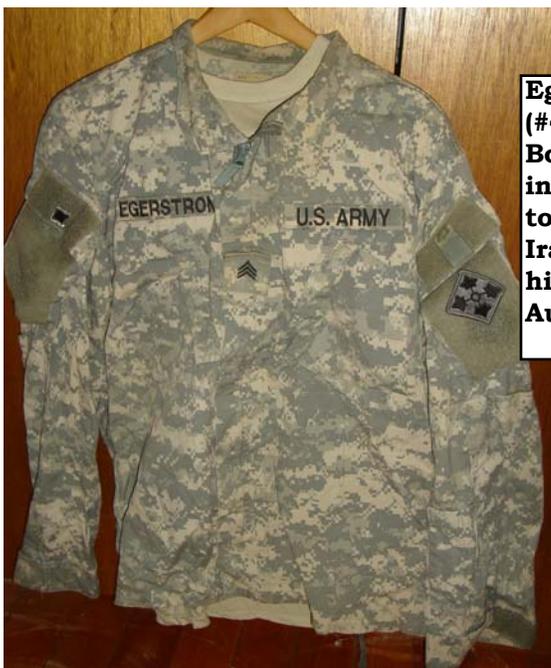
By the time of Egerstrom's second deployment, the Army had adopted the Advanced Combat Uniform (ACU) as the standard uniform for the men. Chuck notes that these uniforms were much more comfortable for wear than the old Desert Combat Uniforms from the first deployment.



With boredom being one of the primary enemies of Chuck's second deployment, he found time to sit back, relax, and get a tan.



Charles with one of his soldiers, after the man was finally awarded the Fourth ID Combat Patch for having been in country long enough.



Egerstrom's ACU (#426) and Desert Boots worn during his second tour of duty in Iraq, donated by himself 30 August 2007.



With all of the slow times and boredom at Camp Wolf, the men were glad to hear when the time came for them to move, up to Fallujah.

In late April 2006 the 2-20 was sent up to Fallujah Iraq.



In Chuck's opinion, Fallujah was a much better place to stay. The living quarters were better, there was internet availability for them, more showers, and Egerstrom was able to go to the gym (not a great one) every morning to work out.

Along with the better living, however, came some other sacrifices. It wasn't as dull in Fallujah as at Camp Wolf. They came under fire from mortar attacks regularly. They went out one day to try firing their rifles on the M-16 range and took mortar rounds on the range. That was the one and only time they did any range firing.

Chuck was attached to the First Marine Expeditionary Force Forward while in Iraq during his second tour. He helped with medical aid for the Marines that he was with.

At Fallujah, the 2-20 fired their rockets more. They actually fired live rockets 62 times at the enemy. There was always more activity and more to do at Fallujah than there was at Camp Wolf, and Chuck says that they liked it better.



Egerstrom's unit in Fallujah



Life in Fallujah was pretty relaxing even with the mortar attacks.

Another thing that they had to get used to and witness was storms, thunder and lightning storms, but also sandstorms.

The storms would move in like a wave of dust, and inside them it could get almost impossible to see.

Egerstrom's job during his second deployment was as the Battery Medical Noncommissioned Officer in Charge of Medical Readiness. He was directly responsible for the medical care and welfare of 97 soldiers and provided routine as well as emergency medical treatment to sick and injured personnel and evacuation as needed. He set up the Battalion Aid Station and did medical training and trained others on the Combat Life Saver Program.



While being attached to a Marine Corps Unit, Charles and members of his unit participated in a recreational football game of Army personnel against the Marine personnel. They Army and Marines had played against each other before, but the Army had not won in the past. Charles was a member of the "Alpha Battery Renegades" and they defeated the Marines. He was awarded a certificate on 26 August 2006 for having played in the game and beat the Marines.



Egerstrom's deployment to Iraq ended in November 2006, and he returned to the United States.

Charles returned to Fort Hood Texas to continue out his enlistment. He was awarded the Army Commendation Medal for meritorious service during his second deployment to Iraq. He also earned the Iraqi Campaign medal.

On 5 July 2007 Charles went on terminal leave from the United States Army. He returned to Minnesota, and was discharged as a Sergeant E-5 on 22 August 2007.

Charles had been awarded the following medals during his time in the Army: Bronze Star Medal, Purple Heart, Army Commendation Medal with "V", Army Commendation Medal, Army Achievement Medal, Good Conduct Medal, National Defense Service Medal, Iraq Campaign Medal, Global War on Terror Expeditionary Medal, Global War on Terror Service Medal, Humanitarian Service Medal, NCO Professional Development Ribbon, Army Service Ribbon, and Army Overseas Service Ribbon.



Charles Egerstrom's Class B Dress Uniform, Physical Fitness uniform, and warm Weather Physical Fitness Uniform donated by himself 30 August 2007.