

Soldier who died won valor award on previous Iraq tour

MICHAEL GILBERT: The News Tribune
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1:00 p.m. A Stryker infantryman credited with saving the lives of five U.S. and Iraqi comrades during his first deployment to Iraq in 2005 died Wednesday after he was struck by small-arms fire, the Department of Defense said Friday.

Staff Sgt. Darrell R. Griffin, Jr., a 36-year-old infantry squad leader, died at the U.S. military hospital in Balad after being shot in Baghdad. His unit came under fire as it was returning to base after conducting security operations in the Iraqi capital.

Griffin was assigned to the 2nd Battalion, 3rd Infantry Regiment, a part of the 3rd Brigade, 2nd Infantry Division from Fort Lewis. He was from Alhambra, Calif.

He served a year on active-duty and three years in the National Guard before returning to active duty in 2001 and arriving at Fort Lewis that July.

He went to Iraq in October 2004 with the 1st Brigade, 25th Infantry Division – the Army's second Stryker brigade – and served a year there with the 1st Battalion, 5th Infantry Regiment.

During that tour, he was awarded the Bronze Star for valor for saving the lives of three U.S. and two Iraqi Army soldiers during combat in the northern city of Tal Afar, Fort Lewis spokeswoman Erin Benson said.

Griffin, who was married, is the 93rd service member from Fort Lewis to die in the Iraq war.

A former commander, writing from Iraq, said Griffin was a tough, determined soldier. As a noncommissioned officer he was serious about taking care of his soldiers and pushing them to be their best, Maj. Brent Clemmer wrote.

"Griff was the type of man you want to have by your side in a fight," said Clemmer, his former company commander. "He was the type of squad leader every young soldier wants to have.

"He's a tough SOB, but he is going to train you to the max and keep you straight when the bullets are flying," Clemmer wrote. "He was the type of NCO that any platoon leader or company commander could depend upon completely to seize any objective."

A memorial service has been tentatively scheduled for next Friday.

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