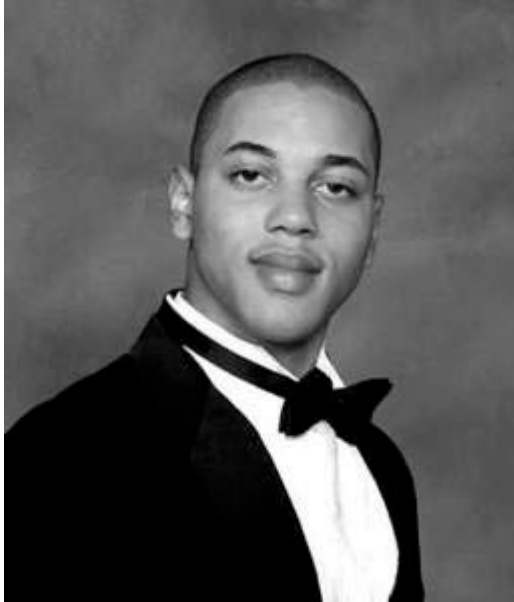


MARTINSVILLE BULLETIN

Local soldier is hurt in Iraq



Spc. Benjamin Stephens.

Sunday, April 6, 2008

By KIM BARTO - Bulletin Staff Writer

A 20-year-old soldier from Martinsville is recovering at Walter Reed Medical Center after being wounded in Iraq last month.

Spc. Benjamin Stephens, a 2005 graduate of Magna Vista High School, lost his right index finger, broke both wrists and sustained injuries on his arms and legs when a rocket-propelled grenade hit his vehicle March 18, according to his mother, Dee Stephens of Ridgeway.

Spc. Stephens, a gunner with the 108th Military Police Battalion out of Ft. Bragg, N.C., received the Purple Heart and Bronze Star for his service.

"He's doing fine, better than expected," Dee Stephens said. "They have some more skin grafting

to do, but he'll make a full recovery."

Doctors are not sure how much longer he will be in recovery, she said. That will depend on how much muscle and nerve damage he has. "They're saying he'll probably be able to stay in the military," she said. "He wants to make a career out of it."

Stephens was deployed to his first tour in Iraq in May 2007. After being wounded, he arrived at Walter Reed on March 23.

Dee Stephens traveled to visit him that day, along with retired Sgt. 1st Class Paulette Winter, who taught Spc. Stephens all four years he was in JROTC at Magna Vista.

Even then, Dee Stephens said, "He was in good spirits and blew a kiss."

Winter said Spc. Stephens was a cadet everyone loved.

"He was an excellent, excellent student and cadet," she said. "He always had a smile on his face, and he still has that smile, even when he's in a lot of pain."

Stephens is one of seven siblings, including an older brother stationed in Ft. Drum, N.Y., who is set to deploy to Iraq later this month.

"Being a single parent, he did me proud," Dee Stephens said.