

## Utah medical unit departs to care for Iraqi detainees

By Matthew D. LaPlante  
The Salt Lake Tribune  
Salt Lake Tribune

Article Last Updated: September 17<sup>th</sup>, 2008

In the intensive care unit at a German hospital for service members wounded in Iraq and Afghanistan, Anil Shandil knew the consequences of war in a way few others could.

For two years, Shandil helped care for service members whose limbs had been blown from their bodies, whose faces had been burnt past recognition, whose lives had been forever altered - and sometimes ended.

Now, less than two years after returning from his tour of duty at Landstuhl Army Regional Medical Center, Shandil is going to Iraq. "And now," he explained, "my job will be to care for the people who did these things to those soldiers."

About 85 soldiers from the Fort Douglas-based 328th Combat Support Hospital - about a third of them Utahns - will depart today for a tour of duty in which their mission will be to provide medical care for Iraqi detainees being held by the U.S. military in Iraq. The unit will train for about a month in Fort Lewis, Wash., and is expected in Iraq by November.

Because the new deployment comes on the heels of the Germany tour, the 328th reservists who served at Landstuhl in 2005 and 2006 were given the option to opt out of the Iraq trip. Shandil, a native of Sacramento, Calif., is one of only a handful of soldiers from the 328th who opted in.

"After two years in Germany, there was a lot of turnover," said Dawn Flynn, one of the unit's chief nurses. "We had a lot of new people come in. So pretty much, for most of the unit, this will be their first deployment."

At a time when many service members are doing third, fourth and fifth tours of duty in Iraq and Afghanistan, Shandil said he felt it was his duty to go when called. But he also understands why so few others made the same decision.

"A lot of it was financial," said Shandil, a critical care nurse in his civilian life, who believes he'll lose as much as \$50,000 in income during the time he is serving in Iraq. "There were also family considerations - a lot of people have young ones at home, so it was harder for them to leave their families and their jobs so soon."

And, Shandil noted, the Germany tour was extremely emotionally taxing.

"You get a lot of severed limbs, a lot of traumatic brain injuries, a lot death and dying," he said. "So the compassion fatigue is rather high."

Also called secondary traumatic stress disorder, compassion fatigue is often suffered by individuals who work closely with victims of trauma - and has many symptoms similar to those suffering from the better-known post-traumatic stress disorder.

The signature symptom is a gradual reduction in the ability of the sufferer to feel compassion for others - one that trauma nurse Shannon Green came to know all too well during her tour of duty in Germany.

"At some point, you just can't do it anymore," Green said after returning home to Utah in December 2006. "I was having anxiety. I wasn't sleeping. I was having bad dreams . . . I saw the

blood, the burns, the body parts."

And yet now, Shandil and the other members of the 328th have been tasked with one of the greatest tests of compassion there could be - to render care for their enemies.

Shandil knows it will be hard. "I'm going to have to keep in mind that what I'm doing in Iraq is separate from what I was doing in Germany," he said. "Yes, these are people who were not kind to us. But as a medic, it's our job to care for them, no matter if that is your friend or your enemy."

That has been the conclusion reached by Joshua Watts, as well.

"It's difficult to get that distaste out of your mouth," said Watts, another of the handful of 328th soldiers that served in Germany and now is heading to Iraq. "But I'm not there to judge who they are and what they've done. I'm there to help - and, if somehow that helps someone change their mind about who we are, as Americans, then I've done my job."

*mlaplante@sltrib.com*

### **Shipping out**

About 85 soldiers from the Fort Douglas-based 328th Combat Support Hospital - about a third of them Utahns - will depart today for a tour of duty in which their mission will be to provide medical care for Iraqi detainees held by the U.S. military in Iraq. The unit will train for about a month in Fort Lewis, Wash., and is expected in Iraq by November.