



## **Soldier earns master's degree while serving in Iraq**

**By Melissa Regennitter of the Muscatine Journal**

MUSCATINE, Iowa —Since graduating from Muscatine High School in 1984, Michael Hagy has experienced many things. He joined the U.S. Army, moved to Texas, married, earned his bachelor's degree and later was deployed to Korea.

Recently, he graduated for the third time. But this wasn't a typical graduation. Hagy earned his master's degree while serving as a military medic overseas.

Hagy enlisted in 1997, eventually attaining the rank of sergeant. He is on assignment in Iraq at Camp Taji, about 20 miles from Baghdad.

**He began working toward his Master of Science in health sciences with a specialty in health care management in the winter of 2004 by taking online courses from Touro University International. This spring he graduated with honors.**

"I submitted assignments from South Korea, Thailand, Vietnam, Kuwait, and Iraq along with the United States," Hagy said. "Anywhere I was able to log onto the Internet, I could research and submit assignments."

He put in long hours — a typical shift at work is 15 or more hours a day. Though Hagy said he feels relatively safe in his position, his job can be stressful and it was not an easy task to finish all of the extra work for classes. It took 18 months to complete the degree.

He's in charge of a 20 bed ward for sick and injured American and Coalition force soldiers and civilian contractors. The unit serves anywhere from 4,000 to 10,000 soldiers in the area.

Injuries and illnesses of all types pass through his ward. Michael said most of the problems he deals with are sick soldiers who acquire infections due to poor sanitary conditions. Another major issue is roadside bombs, or improvised explosive devices (IEDs).

"It is very sad ... they use anything they can find to create bombs," Hagy said about the Iraqi militants. He has seen severe injuries caused by bombs that are dropped out of vehicles traveling in front of convoys of soldiers.

With his fast-paced schedule, the Internet allowed Hagy to study at his convenience. His wife, Amanda, told the Muscatine Journal that representatives at Touro University said that he is the first to graduate from the school while in active combat. He hopes to find employment at a medical facility and become a hospital administrator after he is finished serving his country.

Amanda is at the couple's home in Fort Hood, Texas. She hasn't seen her husband since Dec. 8, 2005.

"I champion him because of his dedication and drive while still working a difficult job under the circumstances of being at war," Amanda said. "I don't know how he did it and was able to keep his grades up ... There are good things going on in Iraq that I think people would like to hear as well."

His parents, Glen and Janet Hagy of Muscatine, haven't seen him since last Thanksgiving when he came to visit and celebrate their 50th wedding anniversary.

"He doesn't have much free time so we are always looking forward to his next visit," Janet said. "I'd like to take him fishing because he likes to fish."

Michael said he has fond memories of boating, fishing and water-skiing on the Mississippi River near the Fairport landing area. Visits to Muscatine are always interesting for the man who remembers running through the woods and playing in areas near the U.S. Highway 61 Bypass as a boy. Now there are homes on the sites where he once played and many new businesses he doesn't recognize throughout the town.

His parents say they will continue to pray for his safe return and will be happy when he can make another trip home to Muscatine.

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