



Capt. Steven Cantrell

It was the largest airborne assault on a single drop zone since World War II.

Under cover of darkness early on the morning of

March 26, 2003, nearly 1,000 members of the 173rd Airborne Brigade blanketed the skies as they jumped into northern Iraq to establish the Coalition's northernmost offensive boundary. The assault, known as Operation Northern Delay, also provided strategic relief for Coalition Forces advancing on Baghdad by forcing the Iraqi army to maintain six divisions in the area to protect their northern flank.

One of the "Sky Soldiers" that morning was armed not with a gun but with a book. Army Capt. Steven Cantrell (90C), a battalion chaplain for 2-503d (Airborne) Infantry, jumped into harm's way with his Bible and earned a Bronze Star for his service.

The medal is awarded to individuals who, while serving in the U.S. armed forces, have "performed a heroic act, meritorious achievement or distinguished service during armed conflict or ground combat while



by Karilon L. Rogers

engaged against an armed enemy of the United States." Capt. Cantrell said he was recommended for the award by his battalion commander for his total service during the assault and subsequent months in Iraq.

Airborne chaplains often are the first soldiers on the ground and endure the same hardships and dangers as all other soldiers.

"We get muddy together. We jump out of the airplane together," Capt. Cantrell stated, adding that although he does not carry a weapon he does have an armed bodyguard, his chaplain assistant, for protection.

As the 173rd Brigade moved through northern Iraq, they seized the city of Kirkuk, the northern oil fields, several military airfields, thousands of enemy weapons and explosives, and millions of dinars worth of terrorist funds. They also defeated organized military resistance and arrested hundreds of terrorists and former regime loyalists, he stated.

It was the people lining the streets that made the strongest impression on Capt. Cantrell, however.

"Hundreds of people stood for hours waving at us," he said. "It was absolutely amazing."

In early March 2004, the brigade was redeployed to its home base in Vicenza, Italy. According to published reports, nine if its soldiers were killed and 95 were wounded in action. Due to Capt. Cantrell's efforts, many brave men and women found spiritual peace while living and working in the harshest of conditions.

Capt. Cantrell earned a master of divinity degree from the Church of God Theological Seminary after his graduation from Berry. He and his wife, Katherine, have four children. **B**



Army Capt. Steven Cantrell (90C), a battalion chaplain, walks before the remains of a fallen comrade.