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"The Marines were very upset and very disappointed because of the effort they had made to make a better life for the Iraqis and then to have this happen," said Capt. Matthew Martin, Yale's company commander.

Haerter's unit had just arrived for a seven-month deployment, and officers tried to make sure his death did not unduly distract the Marines.

"It's something you don't get over," said Lt. Dan Runzheimer, 24, Haerter's platoon leader.

"I wouldn't say it put a cloud on us, but it was always there. The men still knew what they had to do: You have to . . . complete the mission."

As both battalions train for possible deployment to Iraq or Afghanistan, the deaths of their comrades are still in their thoughts.

Yale was always trying to boost the morale of his buddies, said Lance Cpl. Brandon Creely, 21, of Boise, Idaho. "Whenever I was down, he'd tell a joke, tell me it's not as bad as it seems."

Staff Sgt. Grooms, 28, said he knows how Haerter should be remembered.

"He was a hero," Grooms said, "and a damn fine person."



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