

The Iraq Veterans Memorial Transcripts



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Spc. Jose Perez, US Army

Hometown: San Diego, TX

Age: 22

by Drew Cameron

I'd just like to talk about my friend Jose Perez. He was the guy I served with when I was in the Army. He was a Specialist and he was killed in Taji, Iraq in May of 2003. He was a Medic attached to our field artillery unit. I served with him for a number of years before we got send over there. Jose was the kind of guy who would give soldiers who didn't have a car because they didn't have enough money to ride to work. He is the kind of guy who would go out of his way to do a friendly deed. He was the kind of guy that you'll hang out in a beat on the weekends.

It's a really unfortunate thing because this is a guy who really believes in his job as a Medic. You know he was the guy that was tasked with taking care of us. You know he was the guy you can lean on and when you had any sort of issues, you need IV 'cause you were dehydrated. Or you needed something because you got injured or whatever it was. He believed in that and he really worked to his fullest to make that happen for us.

He was 22 years young and umh just like of us send over there, you know kids. He's from Texas, we lived in Okalahoma at Fort Sail. And we all miss him.

LCPL Felipe D. Sandoval-Flores

Hometown: Los Angeles, CA

Age: 20

By Vicky Huynh

Felipe and I have been together for about two and a half years and one of my most fondest memories of us is our very first date. Even though it was almost three years ago, I still remember it like it was yesterday. At the time we were both 18 and it was one of the best nights of my life. We went to 3rd Street Promenade in Santa Monica. And it was love at first sight. I was captivated by his charm and sense of humor.

But we were both trying very hard to impress each other and we were both really nervous. I distinctly remember walking into the diner store and slow dancing on the second floor. And it was just one of the sweetest things ever. And at the end of the night he jokingly picked me up and try to throw me in front of the car. But he put me down. And this is just one of the many memories I have stored in my heart that plays over and over again.

Spc. Genaro Acosta
Hometown: Fair Oaks, CA
Age: 26
By Frances Renee Mercado

My name is Francis Renee Mercado. I live in Escondido. I'm here to honor my brother Army Specialist Genera Acosta. Better known as "G."

Genera was killed in Iraq on November 11th, 2003 just outside Tikrit. He was 6ft 4, 280 pounds. He was chunky, but in his book he wasn't chunky. He was just fluffy. He was a guy who loved what he did. Loved serving our country, it's what he always wanted to do. His goal was to come home and be a Border Patrol Agent.

Genera was 26 when he died. He re-enlisted in October, had his birthday in September and was killed on November on Veterans Day. And than December 13th of 2003, his group from Fort Hood captured Saddam Hussein. My brother was a loving guy, a great brother, a great son, a great dad and a great husband.

Sgt. Alessandro Carbonaro
Hometown: Bethesda, MD
Age: 28
By Gilda Carbonaro

My son is Sergeant Alex Carbonaro. He is a reconnaissance Marine. He was killed in his second deployment to Iraq in Al-Anbar province. My son, he was my only child. He was very special to us. He was loved by so many. Our son was just one of those excruciatingly honest people; but honest in a good way. He knew he had radar to tell the truth from fallacy. He was an ambassador. He was able to make people get along. He could be the prefect diplomat. He brought a whole variety of friends together. He was the glue that held them all together.

He was so generous. I don't know where he learned that. When he was very little he would give us presents. He would go out and buy presents for me, for his father. This is something he gave me when he was I guess twelve years old. I don't even remember. He gave this to me on Valentine's Day.

Spc. Jamaal Addison

Hometown: Lithonia, GA

Age: 22

By Patricia M. Roberts

My angel was given to me on October 7th, 1980 and he remains my angel to this day. Jamaal was killed March 23rd, 2003 in the Iraq war. He was with the 7th Maintenance Company. He was with the Jessica Lynch and the POWs that was his convoy. He died the fourth day of the war.

I just want to tell those that never got the opportunity to know him and know what kind of person that he was, he was definitely an angel and he was a hero. But he was a hero long before he ever got killed in this war.

The best way for me to explain who Jamaal was is that he is the only person that I know that walk the closest that Jesus walk while he was here upon earth. I know that may sound like a bias opinion because of me being his mother but it was just a fact the person that he was. I never had the opportunity to meet anyone like him.

LCPL Shane Swanberg

Hometown: Kirkland, WA

Age: 24

By Matt Howard

My name is Matt Howard. I want to talk about my friend Shane Swanberg. The last night I spent in the States before I went to Japan, I hung out with Shane in Palm Springs. We went to a Miss Teen USA contest and there this girl from Washington, nobody was cheering her on. A lot of the girls had family and friends there. They were cheering. Shane felt bad for her, so we went and got this paper and tape and strung together an impromptu banner. Got up on some chairs in the back of the room and started making this ruckus. Everyone was turning around and looking at us like we're weirdoes. And Shane loved it. He was so off the wall like that.

Sgt. Sherwood R. Baker

Hometown: Plymouth, PA

Age: 30

By Celeste Zappala

And when he came to me, he said I'm gonna miss you most of all, Scarecrow. Because both of us love the Wizard of Oz. And I didn't really understand that it was the last time I would ever see him or hold him. And finally, he gave me a hug and I turned away and I started to cry. And he spoke to the rest of the family and then he walked back into his barracks and raised his hand as if in a salute to us.

And that night an incredible full moon rose in the sky, the biggest full moon I've ever seen. And I thought it was a sign but I didn't know what kind of sign it was, now whenever I see full moons I always think of Sherwood.

LCPL Alexander Arredondo

Hometown: Randolph, MA

Age: 20

By Carlos Arredondo

My name is Carlos Arredondo. I'm from Boston, born in Costa Rica. My son Lance Corporal Alexander Arredondo, US Marines killed in action in the old city, Najaf, fighting against the forces, Mustada Al-Sadar. That happened in August 25th, 2004. He was attacked from a bullet. He was shot by a sniper into his temple. He died instantly. Alexander was 20 years old in twenty days. He was a good son, a very good brother and also he was a very good citizen. He grew up believing not what the country can do for you, is what you can do for your country.

LCPL Alexander Arredondo

Hometown: Randolph, MA

Age: 20

By Melida Arredondo

My name is Melida Arredondo and this is my stepson, Alexander Arredondo. Alexander was 20 years old when he was killed in Najaf, Iraq. He was shot by a sniper, temple and he died immediately.

I'm standing in front of a tree and one of the stories I will always tell about Alex is that when his father and I started dating, I would watch the kids. Alex was fond of climbing trees and one day I got home, I was watching him. I couldn't find him and he was only about ten, about this tall and he had climbed up an 8 foot tree. There were hardly any branches on it and so I made the mistake of asking him to come down and he jumped like a cat, landed just fine. Laughed and than just sort of scurried off.

That describes Alex in a lot of ways. He is a lot of fun, very adventurous, which is part of the appeal for him to become a United States Marine. He was a very loving person. He believed that he was a peacemaker.

PFC Joe Godfrey, Jr.

Hometown: Mexico, NY

Age: 23

By Joe Godfrey, Sr.

My name is Joe Godfrey. I'm from Mexico, New York. My son Joe Junior returned from Iraq in October 2004. He was suffering from PTSD. Failed to get the treatment that he needed from VA Medical Center. They felt that he didn't need to see a psychiatrist. He begged and pleaded. I begged and pleaded for him to see somebody and get treatment, unsuccessfully.

And three months later, three months after returning back he was killed in a robbery and murder. We felt strongly that ah Joe's circumstances had led to his murder that night. Would not been the case had he not been suffering from PTSD and the latent effects. He was out drinking that night so he could sleep that night. As he had too ...

Cpl. Jeffrey Michael Lucey

Hometown: Belchertown, MA

Age: 23

By Debra Lucey

My brother Jeffrey Michael Lucey of the Marine Reserves died on June 22nd, 2004. He hung himself in my family's home. I was in Maine at a camp for children with life threatening illnesses at the time. My father told me that your brother is feeling no pain, he passed away.

I'll never forget all the good times, Jeff and I had, the sledding together. Jeff was my best friend. All of our friends were the same. We, he drove me to school. I'll never forget he was a Junior and I was a Freshman, he drove me to school. We spend a lot of time together, watch movies, we played pool and volleyball in the living room. He used to drive me around in his go-cart, would tie a sled to the back of the go-cart. We were supposed to walk together on our graduation in Holy Community College. Jeffrey was my best friend and always will be my best friend. Even though he is gone he will always be in my heart.

Cpl. Jeffrey Michael Lucey

Hometown: Belchertown, MA

Age: 23

By Kevin & Joyce Lucey

He came back after being in the war. He returned to us July of 2003, and he looked wonderful. He was physically unscathed but he had hidden wounds. And we didn't see it until it was too late. Eleven months after he came back on June 21st, he asked if he could sit on my lap and he suffered.

Then on June 22nd, 2004, after I came home, I discovered him hanging in our cellar after we tried to get him help from the VA. And it was the only way he could escape the pain.

Jeff is not the only one who has done this. There are many others and there are so many of the people coming home suffering from the hidden wounds. And to Jeff's memory, Jeff's legacy is to try to help all those who can't help themselves.

PFC Steven F. Sirko

Hometown: Portage, IN

Age: 20

By Summer Lipford

My name is Summer Lipford and my son Steven Sirko died in Iraq, April 17th, 2005. He was stationed about 50 miles outside of Bakuba. What I miss most about Steven is his eyes that laugh and hugs and kisses. And everything about him, my life is empty. I have a hole in my heart that wind rips through that will never heal. So I hope the President takes notice of this. And allows other parents to have their children back.

Spc. Jonathan Marshall Cheatham

Hometown: Camden, AR

Age: 19

By Barbara Porchia

One thing that I can honestly remember Jon about is how he always like to be a leader. And on one occasion before he graduated from high school, he was playing around with some of his friends at the track and fractured his elbow. He was due to be in a marching contest two days after the fact and I went to the emergency room and told him, Jonathan what are you going to do now, son. You're going to let the band down. He looked at me and says, "I'm a leader, I will never let them down." And my son, played trumpet and actually fractured his right elbow, he was right-handed and marched in the contest, played his trumpet with his left hand. And actually led the band into all ones in the contest. And as he walked off, he looked at me and behind me and said, "Told you, I'll never let you down. That's the kind of leader I am."

Lt. Kenneth Michael Ballard

Hometown: Mountain View, CA

Age: 26

By Karen Meredith

First Lieutenant Kenneth Michael Ballard was my only child. He was 26 years old when he was killed in Iraq on May 30th, 2004. Ken loved watching the movie *Stripes* when he was growing up. It was one of his favorites and it was no surprise to me when he sent me a picture from Iraq of him fooling around pretending that he was Lieutenant Stripes.

My other favorite pictures that he sent was a photograph of him wearing a Hawaiian shirt over full body armor. It kind of demonstrates to me Ken's sense of humor and his sense of adventure. He loved being a soldier most of all. And from what I heard from his friends and his guys over in Iraq, they loved having him as their Lieutenant.

If I could only hear from Ken one more time it would only to hear his voice. It wouldn't be to say anything because we always say everything we needed to say. Ken will always be the brightest star in my darkest night.

Sgt. Sherwood R. Baker

Hometown: Plymouth, PA

Age: 30

By Raphael Zappala

I remember one time shortly before Sherwood, he was a DJ and one of his few jobs actually. He was International Guard to supplement his income and he was a case worker for those mentally handicapped, mentally retarded. Worked for the county up in Pennsylvania. He is also a DJ bringing music to people, putting smiles on their faces, spreading joy. And, uh, I remember the last time he did a little show. Me, my mom, my other brother Dante, we were all there. And he had this banner, we were all signing can't wait till you come back, can't wait till you come back. But ah, so we all signed it. Unfortunately he never came back.

But it was just good to see him put a smile on people's faces just to play the music. Music that everybody wanted. And he had requests and everybody pretty much got their song heard. And it made really happy, and it showed how beautiful he was and how he just cared for people. Just enjoyed making people smile and making people happy. That's one of the main things I remember about Sherwood and that's why I loved him so much. Because he did so much for people and thought of everybody but himself. And that's why I still salute him till this day.

Cpl. Nicholas Ziolkowski

Hometown: Towson, MD

Age: 22

By Tracy Miller

The Marines came to my door. He was killed November 14th, 2004. It was a Sunday. They came about 7:15 in the evening. I was home and they told me that they regretted to inform me that my son was killed. And they knew he had been shot but it was only the next week, the next Sunday that I read in the New York Times how he had been shot. Because there had been an embedded reporter and he was doing a story about Bravo company and Nick was attached to Bravo company. And as I read the story there about how Nick was killed, I think it's terrible. I think Nick, it's such a lost, certainly to me personally but would have much such a difference had he lived because he was that kind of person.

Lt. Seth J. Dvorin

Hometown: East Brunswick, NJ

Age: 24

By Sue Niederer

The most beautiful thing in the world to me was the fact that every single conversation, every single time we saw each other it was "I love you". Everything ended with I love you.

This was a child that every parent would be very, very proud of. Every parent should have the relationship that I have with my son. He was my right hand. He was my friend, my son, my confidant. And to lose somebody such as Seth is a tremendous lost to me as a mother. I've lost what I felt was going to be a young man with a phenomenal future that would have everything that he needed or wanted and would be capable of doing.

My son was very brilliant, he had a future in mind with the FBI and the CIA. And he would have accomplished that future without any question in my mind. He was married. He wanted children and all of that just went down the tubes when he was killed going on a suicide mission for Mr. Bush.

Sgt. Sherwood R. Baker

Hometown: Plymouth, PA

Age: 30

By Alfred Zappala

My son Sherwood Baker came to our family when he was thirteen months old. He was abandoned by his biological parents. One year after he came into our family, our son Dante was born. Two years after that our son Raphael was born. We became a family. Sherwood was very quiet at first. He, I guess, was checking us out because he had been shifted around to a number of families for about six months of his short life at that point. And I guess one night when I was putting him to bed probably within the first week from what I can remember he kinda give me a look like, "Am I going to stay here, are you going to pass me on?" And I guess that's when I fell in love with Sherwood.

When he was killed, his unit took it so hard because he was such a morale booster to most, the rest of his unit. And the other guys used to tease him a lot because he was such a big man, probably about 6 ft 3 and filled out a bit. He was 37 and I think he probably was the kindest person I've ever known.

I'm amazed constantly that he was my child. I thought he was such a gift. And I believe that what most of the people that he served with will always remember about him is his cheerful attitude; his willingness to always jump in and help; and his sense of humor; his love for music and all the arts; and just the way he loved his fellow man.

Sgt. Zachary Kocses

Hometown: Naples, FL

Age: 23

By Trudy Pratt

Zachary was a wonderful young man. He died December 9th, after putting in his time. When he came home we were all so glad, we thought he was safe and sound. He was killed in an automobile accident while he was on his way to a job that was a military connected job. He was a wonderful young man. He always had a smile on his face and a big heart.

On Thanksgiving we were together and he was holding my first grandchild in his arms and he was engaged to a wonderful young girl and he said to us, he looked at the baby and the face and he looked to us and said, "Well, I guess our next baby is going to be the next baby in the family." And that was on Thanksgiving and on December 9th he left this world. So its such a sad thing. Life takes so many different paths and so many different ways. We never know. But during the time that he was in the service, the whole time our hearts were in our throat because we were so concern about him.

Staff Sgt. Paul M. Neff II

Hometown: Fort Mill, SC

Age: 30

By Dawn Brastad

My brother was more than just a name etched in cold stone. And he wasn't just my brother. He was our father's best friend. He was our mother's baby boy. He was a single father and he was part of a band of brothers. When Paul died I was given his laptop computer. It was a bitter sweet gift. On it was hundreds of photos documenting his time in Iraq. He had documented how him and his buddies, making the best of a difficult situation. I could see his life loving nature come through those pictures. The day I heard the news, his helicopter was shot down, I knew he was on it before the call came. There was an instant void. He died doing what he loved. There is some comfort knowing that. The thing that most people remember about Paul is how much he loved life and his infectious smile. Without Paul in this world, the sun just doesn't shine as bright. He is desperately missed by his family, his friends and most of all his son.

Spc. Chris Talley

Age: 30

By Ben & Judy Talley

Our son and brother, Army Specialist Chris Talley, died at age 31 from a faulty medication prescribed by the VA to treat his war injury. Chris's service buddies, whom he long to rejoin, called him Dirt short for older Dirt as he entered basic at 28. He always preached in importance of family. His older brother Ken was his favorite. One of Chris's many tattoos was a character from a children's story that Ken read him when he was a boy. He left his cat with us. Saying we must play with her daily. He was good with people but if they didn't treat him fairly, he would use the trade his way of being for personal comfort.

After injury in Iraq, Chris told his CO not to recommend him for a purple heart because I was only doing my duty, he said. Another incident demonstrating his character happened while serving. An eight-year-old girl popped out of a Baghdad shop and squirted Chris and his buddies with a water pistol. He kept his nervous partner from lashing out but was unable to stop him from dousing her with his canteen. Later he found the girl's family and gave her a few dollars. The following week, she gave Chris an ice cream cone. By welcoming a stranger among us, this Muslim girl and Christian soldier acted as Jesus did.

He took pride in earning a master scuba license. He began restoring a classic surfboard and before he died Chris applied for entry at TCSB Residential Treatment Program. No matter how many times he was knock down, Chris always go back up. His was truly a hero's journey. We wonder today what field he chases dragonflies and plays ... our little boy who ran away.

Sgt. Edward Smith
Hometown: Chicago, IL
Age: 38
By Tim Slater

Hi my name is Tim Slater and I served with 2nd Battalion, 5th Marine back in 2003 during the invasion of Iraq. I was an infantryman there and in gulf company man 25. The first thing I want to talk about is First Sergeant Edward Smith. He was, I'll be honest, he wasn't a friend of mine. He was a Superior in my Battalion. And he was killed in Iraq on ah wounded April 4th and he died the next day of in a hospital.

So the reason, he taught me a lot and I learned a lot from him. He really taught us a lot. He's a true professional. In my battalion, we actually had another First Sergeant who got shot in the elbow and he was wounded and we also had a gunnery Sergeant who got shot in the face.

And just to have three guys who were been in the Marine Corp twenty years get shot like that, umh just taken so quickly and suddenly especially after they taught us so much and sacrificed so much to keep us safe. It just really was kinda psychological blow to my entire unit. As we moved into Baghdad there and just kinda speaks the hideous nature of war and the entire deal.

Well ah it just doesn't really matter how, how good you are or how long you been there or anything like that. People just going to get hit and that's just the reality of warfare. It's just too bad that it's usually the good ones, especially the ones risking so much keeping other people safe. Usually the first ones to get hit. So my heart goes out to anyone who either served overseas or has family that served overseas. It's a lot of sacrifices being made and definitely not really too much you can do.