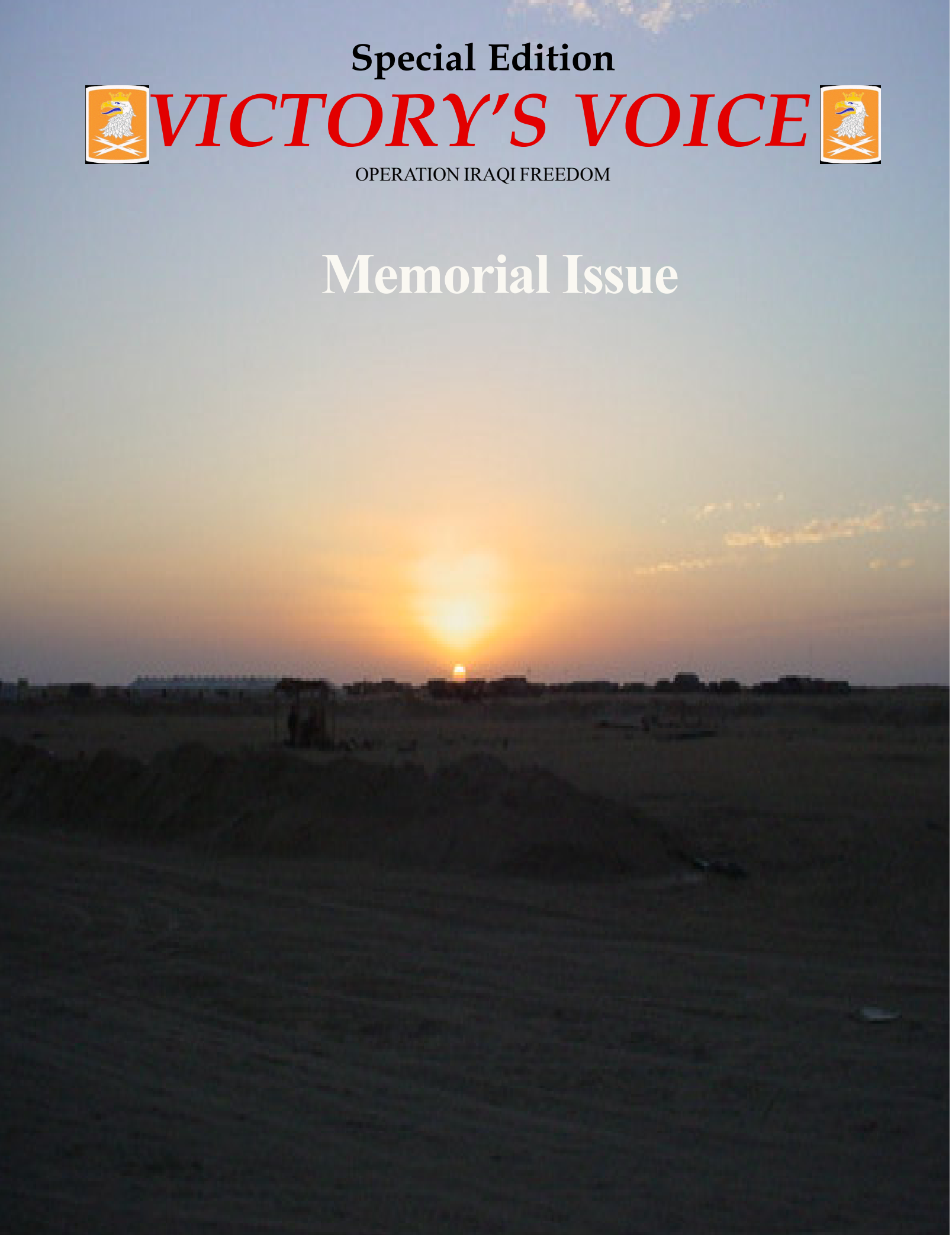
Special Edition

VICTORY'S VOICE

OPERATION IRAQI FREEDOM

Memorial Issue



From the 22nd Signal Brigade Commander

Task Force Signal lost soldiers and civilians to enemy fire in November, December, and January 2004, and awarded 18 Purple Hearts to soldiers for wounds received in combat. Pvt. 1st Class Karina S. Lau and Pvt. 1st Class Anthony D. D'Agastino from 16th Signal Battalion, Spc. Maurice J. Johnson of 501st Signal Battalion, Chief Warrant Officer 2 Alexander S. Coulter and Mr. Brent A. McJennett of the 4th Infantry Division, Spc. Marshall Edgerton of the 82nd Signal Battalion, Sgt. 1st Class Ricky Crockett from the 51st Signal Battalion, and Specialist Arron R. Clark from the 440th Signal Battalion all died going about their duty. Lau and D'Agastino boarded Chinooks to take well earned R&R [leave], Specialists Johnson and Clark, McJennett and CW2 Coulter were ambushed while on convoys. A suicide bomber killed Specialist Edgerton while he performed guard. It is that kind of war.

I don't remember meeting McJennett, although his excellent work was known to me. I do recall having visited briefly with Lau and D'Agastino, soldiers from the 16th Signal Battalion that is in Direct Support of the 3rd Armored Cavalry Regiment. Crockett had been a motor sergeant in three different companies in the 51st Signal Battalion, and no one who met him ever forgot his smile. I did not know Edgerton, but he was an exceptional athlete whose bravery on the athletic field became courage on the field of battle. I can see Johnson reassuring his commanding general that the tactical satellite was up and running. Clark drove his commander with the kind of unassuming swagger only the fearless exhibit. I remember the awe I felt when Coulter first demonstrated his calm command of 4th Infantry Division's complex network. In the context of things, my encounters with these men and women were too brief. As their peers, subordinates, and superiors made clear, our fallen comrades were really, really good citizen soldiers.

You would have learned, as I did, that Lau was a musician, a wit, and enjoyed a 3.8 grade point average as a student in High School. She passed up scholarships for adventure, and introduced humor in the middle of danger as ordnance exploded in the vicinity of her platoon's headquarters. Johnson was a master radio operator who made the dangerous daily drive into the city of Mosul, ensuring that the Mayor of the most important city in his divisional sector could talk with the commanding general of the 101st Airborne Division. Johnson's work is part of the reason political/military operations in the Mosul region of Iraq have been particularly well synchronized. You would have envied D'Agastino's priorities as he insisted on his mother's presence during the classes that prepared him for his deployment. You would have empathized with McJennet's love for motorcycles, the open road, his deep love of family. You would have broken down with the rest of us at the testimony from Coulter's superiors, who, without exception, considered him the superior man.

The Brigade Commander continued...

You would have learned that Crockett never passed up an opportunity to pick up mail, then deliver it to his soldiers, even though it meant running the gauntlet of Baghdad's back streets. To honor him, his roommate expressed his thoughts in the form of a letter addressed to his beloved mentor. Marshall Edgerton helped defeat the Taliban in Afghanistan, returned to his wife Amy, daughter Alyssa, and son Hunter, before deploying to Iraq to assist in the capture of Saddam Hussein. Clark was the nuclear biological and chemical [NBC] leader for B Company 440th Signal Battalion, who later became his commander's driver because that way he'd make sure everyone in his company was protected against NBC weapons. He had made the decision to become an Army ranger; his career goal was to be a Command Sergeant Major. It's a safe bet that he would have succeeded in both ambitions.

It is one of those terrible facts that we learn so much about these soldiers because we attend their memorial services. In clear, heartbreaking strokes, soldiers use their testimonies to reveal the personalities of our heroes. The story these battle buddies tell, time after time, is that what matters most has little to do with a person's race, or station in life, or religious beliefs, or intellectual smarts. What matters is a soldier's willingness to do his or her duty. Get up early, do physical training, clean your weapon, pull guard, volunteer to serve as door gunner, send E-mails to the family, purchase the gift for the best friend, put your daughter's precious scrawl right next to your pillow before you sleep. Get up again, and take the same risks all over again. That's not just bravery. That's courage.

The sacrifice of soldiers is the oldest fact of an Army. Our profession is defined by the event. It is evidence of the risks we all take, a reminder of the gravity of our mission, and their stories of individual heroism serve as sober inspiration to every soldier yet to join. And it is only the enormity of individual loss that makes possible our nation's collective triumph. The memorial service permits us to revisit our comrades in the light of this revelation. Photos of their young faces glisten above the buried bayonets; the hard shells of their poised helmets reconcile playful poses with a Soldier's uncompromising duty. In light of their ultimate sacrifice, these soldiers' eyes exude wisdom, pride in unit, selfless sacrifice, confidence in mission. In death, we retain the images that now embody the best qualities of the human being. Their images do so with such certainty that Commanding Generals and their Command Sergeants Major kneel before them, and render them the coin of their military organizations.

Our pride in their performance and the honor they have bestowed upon our units make our grief bearable. I am fully aware that only time and pride mitigates the grief their families are currently enduring. I join the rest of Task Force Signal in extending our deepest sympathy to the families and loved ones of Pvt. 1st Class Karina Lau, Pvt. 1st Class Anthony D'Agastino, Spc. Maurice Johnson, Mr. Brent McJennett, Chief Warrant Officer 2 Scott Coulter, Spc. Arron R. Clark, Spc. Marshall Edgerton, and Sgt. 1st Class Ricky Crockett. I pray that we will add no more to this list of the Signal Regiment's fallen heroes.

Jeffrey G. Smith Jr.
Colonel, Signal Corps
Commanding

TRAGEDY STRIKES 22nd SIGNAL BRIGADE IN THE MIDDLE EAST

Spc. Arron R. Clark

Chief Warrant Officer 2
Alexander S. Coulter

Sgt. 1st Class
Ricky L. Crockett

Pfc. Anthony D.
D'Agostino

Spc. Marshall L.
Edgerton

Killed: **December 05, 2003**

Army Spc. Arron R. Clark.....see page 16

Army Spc. Arron R. Clark, 20, of Chico, Calif.; assigned to the 440th Signal Battalion, 22nd Signal Brigade, V Corps, Darmstadt, Germany; killed Dec. 5 when his convoy hit an improvised explosive device in Baghdad.

Killed: **November 17, 2003**

Army Chief Warrant Officer 2 Alexander S. Coulter see page 12

Army Chief Warrant Officer 2 Alexander S. Coulter, 35, of Tennessee; assigned to Headquarters and Headquarters Company, 124th Signal Battalion, 4th Infantry Division (Mech), Fort Hood, Texas; killed Nov. 17 when his vehicle, traveling in a convoy to Tikrit, ran over an improvised explosive device in Baqubah, Iraq.

Died: **January 12, 2004**

Army Sgt. 1st. Class Ricky L. Crockett.....see page 22

Army Sgt. 1st Class Ricky Crockett. 37, of Broxton, Ga.; assigned to D Co. 51st Signal Battalion 82nd Airborne Corps, base in Fort Bragg, North Carloina died when his vehicle struck an improvised explosive device while on a mounted patrol in

Killed: **November 02, 2003**

Army Pfc. Anthony D. D'Agostino.....see page 9

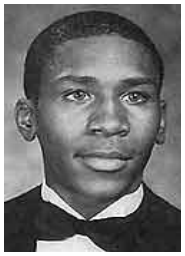
Army Pfc. Anthony D. D'Agostino, 20, of Waterbury, Conn.; assigned to the 16th Signal Battalion, Fort Hood, Texas; killed Nov. 2 in an attack on a CH-47 Chinook helicopter near Fallujah,

Killed: **December 11, 2003**

Army Spc. Marshall L. Edgerton.....see page 19

Army Spc. Marshall L. Edgerton, 27, of Rocky Face, Ga.; assigned to Company A, 82nd Signal Battalion, 82nd Airborne Division, based in Fort Bragg, N.C.; killed Dec. 11 when his camp was attacked with an improvised explosive device in Ramadi, Iraq.

TRAGEDY STRIKES 22nd SIGNAL BRIGADE IN THE MIDDLE EAST



Spc. Maurice J. Johnson

Pfc. Karina S. Lau

Brent A. McJennett

Pfc. Keneth C. Souslin

Killed: **November 02, 2003**

Army Pfc. Karina S. Lau.....see page 8

Army Pfc. Karina S. Lau, 20, of Livingston, Calif.; assigned to the 16th Signal Battalion, Fort Hood, Texas; killed Nov. 2 in an attack on a CH-47 Chinook helicopter near Fallujah, Iraq.

Killed: **November 17, 2003**

Brent A. McJennett.....see page 17

Brent McJennett, 40, was helping with reconstruction efforts by working for a private company, Proactive Communications, to set up communication systems in Iraq, including Internet and telephone access for 4th ID troops; killed Nov. 17 when his vehicle, traveling in a convoy to Tikrit, ran over and improvised explosive device in Baqubah, Iraq.

Died: **December 15, 2003**

Army Pfc. Kenneth C. Souslin.....see page 14

Army Pfc. Kenneth C. Souslin, 21, of Mansfield, Ohio; assigned to C Co. 440th Signal Battalion, 22nd Signal Brigade, V Corps, Darmstadt, Germany; died of non-combat related injuries at Baghdad International Airport, Iraq.

Killed: **November 01, 2003**

Army Spc. Maurice J. Johnson.....see page 20

Army Spc. Maurice J. Johnson, 21, of Levittown, Pa.; assigned to C Company, 501st Signal Battalion, 101st Airborne Division (Air Assault), based in Fort Campbell, Ky.; killed Nov. 1 when his Humvee was hit by an improvised explosive device in Mosul, Iraq.

Signal Eagle Graphic by Spc. Tabitha L. Sale

From the 22nd Signal Brigade Command Sergeant Major

In this special edition of our newsletter, I want to recognize the fallen warriors of Task Force Signal: those who made the ultimate sacrifice for liberty, freedom, justice, and our Nation.

Our mission was to enable the defeat and destruction of the Iraqi Army by providing signal support. What we did during the war ensured V Corps' decisive seizure of Baghdad, and help the trigger pullers eliminate Saddam's regime. But when the war was declared over the enemy took a new face.

We encountered new, armed opposition. Our enemy shifted from organized military units to an insurgency led by former regime loyalists. Their tactics included remote detonations of bombs, increasingly sophisticated ambushes, persistent mortar attacks, and suicide bombers. Despite the enemy's new tactics our signal soldiers continued their outstanding support of the Corps. They marched through a war and stood fast in the transition from major combat to security and stabilization. Our soldiers worked side by side with British and Polish-led multinational divisions and the other thirty three nations that have made CJTF-7 one of history's greatest examples of coalition operations.

Signal soldiers were in direct support of the capture of the 'Ace of Spades', Saddam Hussein. This war was a war of technological advancement, in which signal soldiers lead the way. Eight signal soldiers and one civilian made the ultimate sacrifice and were properly honored in separate ceremonies. Their contributions have not gone unrecognized. Through all the dangers our soldiers stand strong.

I salute the recipients of the eighteen Purple Hearts awarded by Task Force Signal. There is no way to ever repay the families of these heroes. The blood they shed was not in vain. It was a gift too many. Our fallen heroes, and the soldiers who returned wounded from IED attacks have endured harm so that others would not have too. It will be years before most of the people they fought for understand why. But for now Iraq is free.

We will conduct a transfer of authority (TOA) ceremony at 1100, on or about February 4th , handing over control of the largest, most effective tactical data and voice network in military history, to the 3rd Signal Brigade. Our Headquarters remains in Baghdad, the capital of the Free Nation of Iraq. "Corps in the attack."

Ray D. Lane

CSM, USA

VICTORY'S VOICE is a nonprofit newsletter generated by the 22nd Signal Brigade Public Affairs Office.
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Memorial Issue Layout and Design by 2nd Lt. Clare Martinez

To view the 22nd Signal Brigade's news letter online, visit www.22sigbde.army.mil

From The 22nd Signal Brigade Chaplain:

Our friends and fellow soldiers, whom we grieve for and miss, leave behind not only memories of their days with us, but a legacy that directs our own ethics and obligation to that greater love. Beyond doubt, they portray for us all our Army's value of selfless service. Not forced. Not coerced. Each soldier volunteered to join with us to protect; to defend, and to give to a nation of oppressed people sacred and worthwhile things.

These sacred and worthwhile things are revered as honor, respect, liberty and justice for all persons. Indeed, our friends and fellow soldiers deserve special honors for their sacrifices given on behalf of a people they didn't know, a language they didn't speak, and a culture not theirs. Greater love has no one who offers their life for a friend, and so even greater is the soldier who offers a life for the neighbor one never knew. "…Remember, too, that only through work and oft-times through hardships may they be attained. But the compensation of blessing and sweetness at the last will glorify every hour of work and every heartache from hardship."

To feel deep sorrow is right, but let us also remember to give thanks for their faithful service and triumphant sacrifices. We are thankful for the blessed memories and the ties we had with each one. Now, however, they join the heroic soldiers of all ages who encompass us like a cloud of witnesses. Let us ask and pray for courage to enter into their heritage of heroism and self-sacrifice. Let us seek daily in our duties to honor their memory and to preserve their high purposes that the nation which they defended may stand in all coming years for righteousness and peace and that the liberty won may be passed to the children and the children's children. "Therefore, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us also lay aside every weight, and sin which clings so closely, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us . . ." (Hebrews 12: 1 - ESV).

Dr. Samuel Palmer Brooks was president of Baylor University in Texas from 1902 until his death in 1931. On his deathbed he wrote a message to the senior class of 1931 which has become immortal to the students of Baylor. "I stand on the border of mortal life but I face eternal life. I look backward to the years of the past to see all pettiness, all triviality, shrink into nothing and disappear. Adverse criticism has no meaning now, only the worthwhile things, the constructive things that have built for the good of mankind and the glory of God count now. There is beauty, there is joy, and there is laughter in life—as there ought to be, but remember, my students, not to regard lightly nor to ridicule the sacred things, those worthwhile things. "Hold them dear, cherish them, for they alone will sustain you in the end, and remember, too, that only through work and oft-times through hardships may they be attained. But the compensation of blessing and sweetness at the last will glorify every hour of work and every heartache from hardship."' (Encyclopedia of 7700 Illustrations).

We all stand on this border. The Bible presents death as a natural part of our life's experience. In Ecclesiastes 3:1, 2 we read, "There is a time for everything . . . a time to be born and a time to die…." (NIV) The psalmist calls our attention to this fact: "As for man, his days are like grass; he flourishes like a flower of the field; for the wind passes over it, and it is gone, and its place knows it no more." (103:15, 16, ESV).

In contrast, however, to the nihilist who views life and death as meaningless, the teaching of the Bible points out that death is merely a passage from this life into the next. I am reminded of this story. At the funeral of a minister, a little child was seen skipping light-heartedly through the cemetery at dusk. Someone asked, "Aren't you afraid of this place?" "Oh no," she replied, "I only cross through here to get home." More so, the Bible clothes death with a nobility, especially a life given for another. "Greater love has no one than this, that someone lays down his life for his friends." (John 15:13 - ESV)

Michael Hardeman

LTC, Chaplain

Above Photo Courtesy of 16th Signal Battalion. Army Pfc. Karina S. Lau at Fort Hood prior to Operation Iraqi Freedom Deployment.

Love, Sacrifice, Grief

16th Signal Battalion Memorial

By 2nd Lt. Clare Martinez

22 Signal Brigade Public Affairs

She dreamed of teaching music and starring on Broadway. She was a 20 year-old lover of music and musicals. A terrorist attack ensured her voice will never be heard on Broadway and she'll never teach the music she loved.

On Nov. 2, Broadway lost a potential star when the Chinook, AH –64D Army Pfc. Karina S. Lau was on was hit by a surface to air missile near Amiryah, Iraq. Pfc. Lau was homeward bound. She wanted to surprise her parents and so she kept her planned trip a secret, according to the Nov. 4th article by Mathew B. Stannard in the San Francisco Chronicle.

Lau was one of 16 soldiers killed during that attack. Army Pfc. Anthony D. D'Agostino also died as a result of that attack. D'Agostino and Lau had the 16th Signal Battalion in common. They were two soldiers who, as their peers tell it, were a source of humor throughout the often dangerous and unnerving times in Iraq.

There was no escape from the sorrow that filled the auditorium at Al Asad Airbase in Iraq on November 5th. More than 300 soldiers attended the 16th Signal Battalion's memorial service for D'Agostino and Lau.

"Everyday we put on our uniform we accept the fact that we may be called into harms way," said Cpt. Montrese Love, commander of B Company, 16 Signal Battalion. "But when it happens…it's the hardest thing to accept in a unit."

"Yes," said Cpt. Ramsey, "it's tempting to be bitter with our enemies but we must remember to look to God to help us."

It's hard to tell at what point during the memorial service that the soldiers started to weep but you could hear sniffles through out the tributes being paid in honor of Lau and D'Agostino.

"She was always surprising me and the team," said Sgt. Jeffrey Meeks while standing before the mourners. "I remember one night mortar rounds and shells were going off. We searched a building for a place for cover. We had to move because you could feel the heat from the rounds.

See continuation on page 9

1SG Cassandra Primous, salutes Memorial display while Taps are played in honor of Pfc's Antony D'Agostino and Karina S. Lau.

"Grief" from page 8

This bright light goes off. We were scared. Pfc. Lau was trying to turn off her digital camera."

Sgt. Meeks was Lau's section sergeant. He decided to have a talk with her. "Lau, that was unacceptable. You just took ten years off my life." She smiled and said, "Don't worry about it sergeant those were ten of the bad years," according to her section sergeant.

"What could you say to that?" asked Sgt. Meeks.

The soldiers in the auditorium all laughed as Sgt. Meeks continued to share his memories of Lau.
As the speakers traded places and shared their memories of Lau and D'Agostino, one soldier looked on silently. Pfc. Derek Sellers was aboard the Chinook that went down on November 2nd. He sat expressionless throughout most of the service.

Sellers and D'Agostino were friends going on a trip to celebrate D'Agostino's 21st Birthday. They boarded the Chinook and were ready to party when the unthinkable happened—the Chinook went down.

While Sellers was recovering at the hospital he kept asking about D'Agostino. His command tried their best to shield Sellers from the news of D'Agostino's death. On the day that Sellers' returned to duty, a memorial was held for his best friend. Sellers found out about D'Agostino's death a few hours before the memorial. The memorial was held one day before D'Agostino's 21st birthday. So the memorial happened instead of a birthday celebration, and the man who wanted to celebrate his friend's birth instead had his death to mourn.

Photo By 2nd Lt. Clare Martinez

Top right: Army Pfc. Derek Sellers comforted by a fellow 16th Signal Battalion Soldier following a memorial held for Pfc. Anthony D. D'Agostino and Pfc Karina S. Lau. Pfc. Sellers was on board the ill fated AHD-64 Chinook that killed 16.

Photo By 2nd Lt. Clare Martinez

Fallen Heroes
of Task Force Signal,
Operation Iraqi Freedom
2003 - 2004
SPC Marshall
Edgerton
82nd Sig Bn
SPC Maurice
Johnson
501st Sig Bn
PFC Karina
S. Lau
16th Sig Bn
SFC Ricky L.
Crockett
51st Sig Bn
CW2 Alexander
S. Coulter
124th Sig Bn
Mr. Brent A.
McJennett
124th Sig Bn
PFC Anthony
D'Agostino
16th Sig Bn
SPC Arron
R. Clark
440th Sig Bn

I Am A Soldier

I am a soldier.
My blood permeates the soil of many countries.

I have gasped my last breath on many a desolate
stretch of beach. For you...all of you,
the children
who play in the parks,
the mothers who watch over them,
the fathers who struggle to sustain them.
There are those here
who have belittled and reviled me,
who have made a mockery of me
and what I stand for.
You, also, have I suffered and died for.
I withstood heat, insects and disease
So the right to dissent would be yours.

I endured the pain and terror of battle
and the maiming of my body
to ensure that you might worship as
you please. I died in agony in order that you,
no matter who or what you are,
Have the freedom to choose your own destinies.

-Anonymous-

124th Signal Battalion Memorial

By Pfc. MICHAEL HOWARD
22 Signal Brigade Public Affairs

TIKRIT, Iraq -- "His character was that of excellence." "There was something special about him." " His presence inspired me to surpass what even I thought I was capable of." "He was the epitome of a warrant officer, and a quiet professional.

Likely, few soldiers would deem themselves worthy of praise of this caliber. But these sentiments, expressed by Sgt. Maj. John McCleary and Chief Warrant Officer 2 Richard "Rick" J. Schafer, respectively, were no less than the lives, works, and ultimate sacrifices of two exemplary soldiers demanded.

In the final hours of November 11, Brent McJennett, Chief Warrant Officer 2 Alexander Scott Coulter and their crew had just finished a job and were en route for the next task, when their vehicle ran over an improvised explosive device, set by terrorists, in Tikrit. Both men were killed in the blast.

Nine days later, a somber but devoted crowd of more than 400 assembled to pay tribute to the memories of Coulter and McJennett. As the ceremony opened with Psalm 139: 1-12, nary a sound rippled through the crowd, but many were unable to suppress silent tears.

Mumbled greetings between friends before the ceremony seemed to ring hollow, and attempts at condolence paled under the spectre of the loss that this team had suffered. Task Force Iron Horse had lost two of their greatest.

"It isn't fair. It doesn't make any sense. It wasn't supposed to happen this way. I hope we catch the knuckleheads who did this, and soon. I was just talking to him the other day. What are going to tell his family, his wife, his children? How are we going to face them when we go back?"

Lt. Col. Gilley G. Richardson's feelings were a reflection of the commingled despair and rage that seemed to prevail among Task Force Iron Horse in the Memorial Ceremony in honor of At Coulter and Mr. Brent Allen McJennett. The subject of the ceremony was in heartbreaking contrast to the vibrant, cloudless sky under which it was held.

"...He said he didn't want to be in a test division. He wanted to be in a unit that deployed. He wanted to do his job in the field and in combat. Scott loved the army, he loved being a warrant officer, and he loved his job. He was a true warrior,"

Chief Warrant Officer Alexander S. Coulter

The eulogies that followed were a testament to just how quickly and just how deeply Army friendships can cement. In the brief contact Schafer had with Coulter, the two had formed a bond usually found only between lifetime friends.

"I believe there was no mountain we couldn't climb, in this world. He and I were a team. There was no problem we couldn't fix, and we relied on each other heavily. I learned a lot from Scott in our seven months together here and I will never forget the things that he taught me, and the times that we shared," he said.

When Shafer first met Coulter, his impression was so strong that he would remember it even in Coulter's death. "The first time that I ever spoke to Scott Coulter was at a [field training exercise] that we were having at Fort Carson... I was actually calling for help. Scott was there, so I talked to him. When I first heard Scott's voice, I remember thinking: Where is this guy from? Scott, of course was from Tennessee, and his accent definitely showed it. We put our heads together, and we

see continuation on next page

Photo by: Pfc. Michael Howard

124th Signal Battalion Memorial Shrine built in honor of Chief Warrant Officer 2 Alexander Coulter (image left) and Mr. Brent McJennet (image right). Coulter and and McJennet died when their vehicle struck an improvised explosive device.

continued from previous page

were able to make it happen."

Though the relation could have ended at this point, coincidence allowed the bond to deepen. "A few months later, he and some others from 124th[124th Signal Battalion, 4th Infantry Division] came to Fort Carson for exercises in preparation for [the national training center in Ft. Irwin, Calif.]. He and I instantly started working together on numerous problems and got along very well."

Training the battalion, however, was apparently not enough to fulfill Coulter's sense of duty. "I remember… standing in Scott's office, talking about the deployment and Scott said something that caught my attention. He said he didn't want to be in a test division. He wanted to be in a unit that deployed. He wanted to do his job in the field and in combat. Scott loved the army, he loved being a warrant officer, and he loved his job. He was a true warrior," said Schafer, his voice breaking with emotion as he struggled to continue.

When preparations for the signal battalion's movement toward Iraq began, he recalled. "Scott was adamant that he was going to go first. So I told him he could ride in the front seat so he'd cross the border before I did. We crossed the border together."

Upon arrival, one of Coulter's main concerns was to make life easier for himself and his battle buddy, said Coulter. "Scott came well prepared," he said, with the faintest hint of a reminiscent smile, "We both shared a tent that we lovingly referred to as the "Taj." The Taj was the object of much envy among the warrants. Scott and I were living the good life… I have to admit, I had it pretty good. **Continued page 16.**

In Loving Memory of Pfc. Kenneth Souslin
440th Signal Battalion

Above: Fallen soldier memorial displayed for Pfc Kenneth "Hot Sauce" Souslin during separate memorial service held in his memory 18 December 2003.

Picture Top Right: 440th soldiers gathereed inside Palace at Camp Vicotry for memorial. Picture Above: C Co. soldier grieves after memorial service for Pfc. Kenneth C. Souslin.

CampVictory Memorials December 2003

Above: Seven 440th soldiers fire three volleys to honor their fallen with a twenty one gun salute. Photo Right: Buglar plays taps during separate memorial service held December 10th in honor of Spc. Arron R. Clark.

Bottom Left: 22 Signal Brigade Commander Col. Jeffrey G. Smith kneels as he places the 22 Signal Brigade Coin at the foot of the Fallen Soldier Memorial. Bottom Right: 440th Signal Battalion soldiers mourn their fallen.

Photos By: 2nd Lt. Clare Martinez

Road Runners Remember, Honor Spc. Arron Clark

By 2nd Lt. Clare Martinez
22 Signal Brigade Public Affairs

BAGHDAD, Iraq – They called his name three times and three times he did not answer. Moments later seven of Spc. Arron R. Clark's fellow soldiers fired three volleys into the Baghdad air. The traditional twenty-one-gun salute is part of a soldier's final farewell.

Spc. Arron R. Clark, 20, B Company, 440th Signal Battalion, died December 5th when the convoy he was in was struck by an improvised explosive device in Baghdad. More than 400 soldiers gathered to share their memories of a soldier who was well know for his ambitions of serving the Army as an airborne, air-assault, ranger and his dedication to fitness.

"The qualities I am still trying to develop as an NCO [non commissioned officer], Clark mastered as a junior soldier," said Army Sgt. Earl Johnson, Jr., Clark's first line supervisor.

Graphic by CSM Thomas J. Clark

Spc Arron Clark assigned to the 440 th Signal Battalion, Darmstadt, Germany was killed Dec. 5 when his vehicle, traveling in a convoy ran over an improvised explosive device in Baghdad.

Clark served as B Company's Nuclear, Biological Chemical [NBC] training expert. He was responsible for ensuring proper employment of the Army's latest NBC detection, and decontamination equipment during the onset of Operation Iraqi Freedom.

"Clark inspired confidence in me," said Cpt. Chuck Boles, B Company Commander, "and I conveyed that to the company." Boles fought back tears as he addressed the crowd. "Clark always spoke honestly. He was always willing to do the hard jobs because he was strong mentally and physically." Clark was Boles' driver during the ill-fated convoy.

One by one, eight speakers from the 22 Signal Brigade approached a podium. They each shared a memory of Clark that visibly stirred the emotions of the soldiers gathered.

"I really wish we didn't have a reason to come here today," said Pfc. Jason Jestila, sadly. Jestila recounted his last moments with Clark.

"I remember waking him up that morning. I had to go to Balad. He had to go to OCPA [Office of the Coalition Provisional Authority]. I thought we'd see each other back at our tents that night," said Jestila, "but Arron got cheated.

"He got cheated out of family and friends. He was cheated out of his dreams. He was cheated out of his dream to be Airborne, Air Assault, Ranger."

"If I had one last chance to tell Clark anything," said Spc. Eric Hemingway, "I'd say, I'm glad to have had you as a friend. You've impressed me with your focus, and perseverance, and qualities as a soldier."

Jestila and Hemingway are both soldiers from B Company, 440th Signal Battalion.

Jestila offered a very special message to the parents of Clark when

continued next page

Clark Continued

he addressed his fellow soldiers at the memorial held in honor of Clark on December 10th. " I think you should know you did a good job with him. You shouldn't have any regrets."

Clark's outstanding conduct during Operation Iraqi Freedom demonstrated his commitment to restore liberty and human dignity to those who suffered under the oppressive regime of Saddam Hussein, said 440th Signal Battalion's Command Sgt. Maj. Thomas Clark.

"Spc. Clark you made the ultimate sacrifice for our country and you will forever live in our memories. And I promise you," said the sergeant major, "we will do everything we can to protect freedom for future generations, whenever, and wherever it is threatened."

44OTH Signal Battalion pays tribute to Spc Arron R. Clark who died in an IED attack early December 2003.

The memorial ceremony took place in the same palace at Camp Victory where 4 months earlier Spc. Clark had reenlisted for Fort Bragg. Clark reeinlisted inside one of Sadaam Hussein's former palaces.

The final tribute to Clark occurred shortly after the last memorial speaker returned to his seat. After a momentary pause, B Company's 1st Sgt stepped forward to call roll. The first sergeant called the names of B Company soldiers before he summoned the one soldier who could not respond. Military Protocol directs the first sergeant to call for his fallen, three times, before he tells the audience, ceremonially, what they already know. 'Spc. Arron R. Clark killed in action. December 5th.'

Clark will receive the Purple Heart posthumously according to a note published in Volume 1, Issue 30 of 440th Signal Battalion's 'CSM Notes'.

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Brent McJennett

"I only wish that I could have thanked him as we tore down and packed up together in preparation for going home," he added.

"I knew there was a possibility of the unthinkable, but never in my worst nightmare did I think that it would happen to Scott.

I will always keep a special place in my heart and mind where I will always remember him as my fellow soldier, fellow warrant officer, and close friend."

It goes without saying that Scott's death was not the only blow to strike Task Force Iron Horse, however.

"Brent McJennett, on his second war, was a veteran soldier, a civilian who asked to come with our fighting force," said Richardson. "In a brief moment, he was gone.

"[Brent worked hard] so that our soldiers had Internet and phones to call their loved ones at home. He once again volunteered, answered the call, to come and serve with us. Here in 4th Infantry Division for Task Force Iron Horse. He provided a great service to us, and those families at home that were able to talk to their sons and daughters, and read their e-mails," said Maj. Sigmund B. Belisch.

It was truly evident that he loved his work, and he loved to go ride his motorcycle; he liked the taste of a good Cuban cigar. We spent a lot of time] talking about family. And family was very important to him," he said

"I'm a Chaplain. I'm supposed to have an answer for your questions and thoughts. I do not. But I do have a thought, that God has given us, through the Psalms. The bible tells us in Psalm 139… God finds a way to pull back the curtain and let his light shine into us," said Richardson.

"One day, we will remember with joy, what a gift were the lives of these two men. We will miss Mr. Coulter, and Mr. McJennett. We will mourn, we will pray for their families. For our soldiers, and all our families at home. We will carry on the fight together, as they would want us to, and we will win", said Richardson, his voice rising with emotion and determination, "Make no mistake about it. We're winning today and we will carry on, and win the fight. We will carry on, and give thanks to God."

The noted confederate general Albert Pike once said, "What we have done for ourselves alone dies with us; what we have done for others and the world remains and is immortal." Judging from the size of the grieving crowd, all who were able to talk to their loved ones largely because of these men, it became apparent that Coulter and McJennett had accomplished a lot of the immortal.

Suicide bombers strike U.S. base in Iraq, killing 1

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By CHRISTOPHER TORCHIA, Associated Press

BAGHDAD, Iraq (AP) - Three suicide bombers in a furniture truck blew themselves up at the gates of a U.S. Army base Thursday, killing one soldier and wounding 14. It was the third suicide attack on American troops in Iraq this week.

Three wounded soldiers were evacuated from the headquarters of the 82nd Airborne Division west of Baghdad to a combat hospital and the other 11 wounded were treated and returned to duty, the U.S. military reported.

There were no U.S. fatalities in the previous two suicide attacks this week, indicating defenses erected at American facilities were paying off.

Three Iraqis were killed in the truck that exploded Thursday at Champion Base in Ramadi, 60 miles west of Baghdad.

The region around Ramadi and the nearby city of Fallujah is one of the most dangerous for coalition troops and sits in the so-called Sunni Triangle, where the majority of U.S. deaths in hostile action have occurred since President Bush declared an end to major combat May 1.

On Tuesday, suicide bombers, one in a car and another on foot, blew themselves up at the gates of two U.S. military bases, wounding at least 61 American soldiers but failing to inflict deadly casualties on the scale of recent attacks in Iraq.

Most of the soldiers were slightly hurt by debris and flying glass, indicating the defenses around U.S. facilities - sand barriers, high cement walls and roadblocks leading to the entrances of bases - were having an effect.

At the same time, the suicide bombers' continued testing of U.S. defenses showed their tenacity; they seek to undermine American resolve by inflicting mass casualties with a single strike.

Also Thursday, the military reported one U.S. soldier drowned and another was missing after a patrol boat accident on the Tigris River in Baghdad.

"The soldiers were conducting routine patrols on the Tigris River when one of the soldiers fell overboard, and the other soldier jumped in to save him," the U.S. Central Command said in a statement.

The incident occurred Wednesday, and the drowned soldier from the Army's 1st Armored Division was found Thursday morning, the statement said.

U.S. soldiers said an Apache helicopter that crash-landed near the northern city of Mosul might have been hit by ground fire while making a low pass over the area.

A military spokesman had insisted that the helicopter was forced to crash land Wednesday because of mechanical failure and that the uninjured crew reported no ground fire. But a commander later said that he didn't know whether ground fire brought down the 101st Airborne Division helicopter.

The Apache came down near a highway south of Mosul, Iraq's third-largest city. Troops guarding the site Thursday morning said the chopper had been hit by enemy fire. They asked not to be identified.

Brig. Gen. Frank Helmick later said the cause of the crash was unclear. "It could have been a mechanical failure but again, we are looking at all possibilities," he said.

Mosul was the site of the deadliest incident so far involving U.S. forces. On Nov. 17, two Black Hawk helicopters collided and crashed, killing 17 soldiers. Although military spokesmen initially insisted that the collision was the result of an accident, officers have since acknowledged that ground fire was the likely cause.

Also Thursday, Ghazi al-Talabani, director of the Northern Field Protection Force, which guards oil pipelines in northern Iraq, said an explosion set a pipeline ablaze, forcing officials to halt the flow.

He said the pipeline links the Beiji refinery in northern Iraq with the al-Doura refinery near Baghdad.

An official of the U.S.-led coalition, speaking on condition of anonymity, said a pipeline between Beiji and al-Doura was sabotaged late Tuesday or early Wednesday. It was unclear whether the official referred to the same incident.

In Samarra, another volatile city 60 miles north of Baghdad, two members of the U.S.-led paramilitary Civil Defense Corps were shot and killed overnight while on patrol, witnesses said Thursday. The attackers were not identified.

Mourners praise 'a man of courage'

A soldier from Levittown who died in Iraq is buried.

By Dwayne Campbell
Philadelphia Inquirer Staff Writer

BRISTOL TOWNSHIP - One by one, they read the cards of sorrow and a state House resolution that marked the passing of Maurice Johnson, 21, a man who grew up in Bucks County and was serving in Iraq when he was killed.

"His loss came as a shock to all of us serving in the 101st Airborne Division," family friend Gwen Davis read from the card from an Army commander. "Maurice was a man of courage and character."

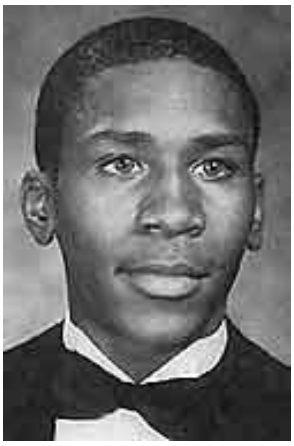
At Johnson's funeral yesterday, the day after Veterans Day, dozens of relatives, friends, and township and school officials recalled Johnson, 21, in much the same words as his military peers.

"I'm proud of him," said Johnson's uncle, Sonny Jones, 72, who was wounded in combat in Korea five decades ago. "Everyone should serve this great country. That's what he did."

Johnson, a communications specialist who was born in Dallas and grew up in the Bloomsdale section of Levittown, died Nov. 1 when the civilian vehicle he was riding in was bombed in Mosul.

The Army posthumously awarded Johnson the Purple Heart and the Bronze Star for meritorious service, his family said.

Yesterday, at the First Presbyterian Church on Emilie Road, several soldiers sat among the congregation; some were from the area and others from Fort Campbell, Ky., where Johnson was based. Two of them, wearing white gloves, stood solemnly on either side of Johnson's casket, which was draped in Old Glory.



Spc. Maurice J. Johnson,
C Company, 501st Signal Battalion

The flag, Sgt. Nicholas Pierce said, would be folded and presented to the family at the grave at Beverly National Cemetery in Burlington County.

At the church, longtime family friend Anne Watts performed a solo that harked back to the spirituals of old.

In a eulogy read afterward by Elizabeth Carter, Johnson was remembered as a "plain nice guy" who lived in Bristol Township for 18 years, attended Harry S Truman High School, ran track and played football and spent hours at the neighborhood basketball court. He was also a graduate of Bucks County Technical School.

Tony Stallworth, another family friend, said Johnson's mother, Jennifer, who died two years ago, encouraged him to join the Army after graduating from high school because he was puzzled about what to do next.

Johnson enlisted in July 2000.

"I remember him coming with the papers and saying, 'Mr. Tony, I'm going in,' " Stallworth said. "He said to me, I'm going in as a boy, I'm coming back as a man.' "

Carter said Johnson achieved that goal.

"Maurice came back a man. He came back a champion," she said.

Johnson is survived by a daughter, Laniyah, 1; his sister, Keisha Johnson, 25; brothers Joshua Johnson, 19, and Abdul Hashim, 13; and other relatives.

Yesterday, as he stood outside the church surrounded by a throng of friends - some wearing ribbons with a photo of Johnson attached - Joshua Johnson reflected on his brother's life.

"He was a good guy," Joshua Johnson said. "He just did what was right."

Article and photograph reprinted from the Screaming Eagles website, http://101_lha.tripod.com/101st_lha

Wounded in Action:

51st Signal Battalion

Capt. Jane Secord B Co.
Spc. Edward P. Berridge B Co.

32nd Signal Battalion

Pvt. 1st Class Dugan SEN Team A22 32nd
Tom Ironside CECOM [Civilian] 32nd

16th Signal Battalion

Pvt. 1st Class Derek Sellers

234th Signal Battalion

Sgt 1st Class Kevin Atkinson C Co.
Sgt. Alyssa Peterson C Co.
Pvt. 1st Class Fenten Phan B Co.

124th Signal Battalion

Sgt. Maj. John T. McCleary HHC
Sgt. Brian E. Daly HHC
Nancy Mc Donald [Civilian] HHC
Capt. David E. Tompkins A Co.
Spc. Michael Kamenski A Co.
Pvt. 1st Class Laura A. Gauthier A Co.
Sgt. Gary Dollar B Co.
Spc. Eduardo Chavez B Co.
Spc. Michelle Thomas B Co.
Spc. Kristopher K. Wicks B Co.
Sgt. Corey Anderson 534th Signal Co.
Sgt Timothy Williams 534th Signal Co.

Image above: Silhouette of a Tenth Mountain Division soldier in helmet and rifle, 1943-44. ***Credit:*** *Western History/ Genealogy Department, Denver Public Library.*

Final Roll Call

Sgt. 1st Class
Ricky L. Crockett

Photos by: Pfc. Michael Howard

51st Signal Battalion Soldiers Final Roll Call:

Soldiers of D Co., 51st Signal Battalion gathered in force for the memorial service held in honor of Sgt 1st Class Ricky L. Crockett. Crockett was killed when his vehicle was stuck by an improvised explosive device while on mounted patrol in Baghdad. Crocket served the Army for 20 years. He was promoted posthumously to Sgt. 1st Class. He is survived by his wife, Megan and 14-year-old daughter, Marvise.