

WINSTON-SALEM JOURNAL

U.S. Hero: 1st Lt. Leevi Barnard Buried



Journal Photo by Lauren Carroll

Residents and businesses honor 1st Lt. Leevi Barnard with flags and ribbons along the road to Blue Ridge Elementary School in Ararat, Va. Barnard was killed May 21 while serving in Iraq.

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ARARAT, Va. - The flags and red, white and blue ribbons began at the Virginia state line marking a route of patriotism and pathos for those who attended services yesterday for 1st Lt. Leevi Khole Barnard.

Barnard, 28, a member of the North Carolina National Guard, was killed May 21 when an improvised explosive device hit the unit he was serving with in Baghdad.

He grew up in the green hill country northeast of Mount Airy that straddles the border of Surry County, N.C., and Patrick County, Va.

Sam Lewis, a member of the Patriot Guard Riders, who lives in Dublin, Va., stood in front of Blue Ridge Elementary School where the funeral was held and talked about the importance of honoring fallen soldiers.

The Patriot Guard Riders attend funeral services for those who are killed while defending America.

For Lewis, a Vietnam War veteran, being a member of the guard is about respect and love of country. That takes on a special resonance in the South where many are outspoken about their patriotism

"They love their country," Lewis said.

Grief hits small towns hard, he said. The loss of one person is felt keenly, he said.

"If you don't know the person, then someone you know does. People are more close-knit."

Barnard's funeral and burial were closed to the media, and the family guarded its privacy. Several of those who attended wouldn't talk about Barnard's life or legacy out of respect for the family's wishes.

A childhood friend, who wouldn't give his name, said that Barnard had attended Blue Ridge Elementary School near the small family plot where he was buried.

The area was a favorite playground of Barnard's when he was a boy.

"This is his stomping ground," the man said. "This is where he was born and raised."

About 625 people attended the service, said Major Matt Handley, a spokesman for the North Carolina National Guard.

Traffic backed up on the twisting road to the cemetery causing many people to leave their cars and walk part of the roughly three-fourths of a mile to the cemetery.

Barnard was laid to rest among others in his extended family including Nitens, Barnards and Montgomerys, while a rooster from a nearby farm crowed.

National Guardsmen have a special tie to the places they come from, Handley said. Often they are gone from those areas for relatively short service stints.

"They have that community tie," he said. "When there's a death within a guard unit, it affects the community."

Barnard graduated from Patrick County High School in 1998 and joined the N.C. Army National Guard in 2004.

He graduated from UNC Charlotte in 2007 with a bachelor's degree in political science and a minor in Arabic studies.

He was one of three soldiers with the 252nd Combined Arms Battalion, 30th Heavy Brigade Combat Team, who were killed May 21, Jason Chudy, a U.S. Army spokesman, said in a news release.

Army Reserve Maj. Jason George and Missouri National Guardsman Sgt. Paul Brooks, were remembered along with Barnard at a memorial service at Forward Operating Base Falcon on the southern edge of Baghdad on May 29.

George was the battalion's civil-military officer, Barnard was his assistant and Brooks was the team's medic.

Barnard was remembered at that service as a soldier's soldier. He rose from the enlisted ranks to earn his commission as an artillery officer.

"It was a privilege to have Leevi as a friend," said Sgt. 1st Class Michael Street. "All the things that made him a good officer made him an even better friend."

MARTINSVILLE BULLETIN

Patrick man killed in action on third tour in Iraq

Sunday, May 24, 2009

By BULLETIN STAFF REPORTS -

Thomas L. Barnard remembers his grandson, First Lt. Leevi Khole Barnard of Ararat, as a man of integrity.

"He was solid," Barnard said. "Anything he said, you could depend on."

Around midnight Thursday, the family was notified that First Lt. Barnard died in combat while serving on his third tour of duty in Iraq.

Barnard said family members have received few details of the incident from the military, except that there were eight servicemen involved and three were killed.

He was not sure when the incident occurred.

Barnard recalled helping raise his grandson. He said they enjoyed hunting and fishing together.

"He was like a son to me," he said.

First Lt. Barnard was the son of Pamela Jane Barnard Payne of Patrick County. She is the daughter of Thomas Barnard and his wife, Daisy Barnard.

First Lt. Barnard went to Blue Ridge Elementary School and graduated from Patrick County High School in 1998, according to a release from Patrick County School Superintendent Roger Morris.

Thomas Barnard said his grandson was in JROTC in high school and then worked and attended college in Charlotte, N.C. He could not immediately recall the name of the college. Barnard said his grandson had been in the military for several years.

He added that he did not know when his grandson's remains would be returned to the United States.

"It is difficult to imagine the loss to our community, particularly at a time of remembering our fallen soldiers," Morris wrote Friday, referring to this weekend's Memorial Day observance. Morris has ordered that the flags at all Patrick County schools be lowered to half-staff until Barnard's burial. He also requested that a moment of silence in the schools on Tuesday be dedicated in Barnard's memory.



First Lt. Leevi K. Barnard

