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South Florida Sun-Sentinel.com

Hollywood native killed while serving in Afghanistan

Paratrooper, 37, from Hollywood killed while serving in Afghanistan

By Elizabeth Baier

South Florida Sun-Sentinel

August 5, 2007

Dania Beach Even on his final mission, Sgt. 1st Class Michael S. Curry was worried about others.

In an e-mail, he described his priorities to longtime friend Jeff Aronsky, who had invited the Army paratrooper to their 28th high school reunion.

"Sorry for the late response and even sorrier on the fact that I can't attend," Curry said in the June 26 message. "Very good reason though, trying to get 100 soldiers home safe from Afghanistan."

Aronsky was among the friends and relatives who gathered Saturday to honor Curry, a Hollywood native who died July 23 at age 37 when a roadside bomb exploded in Sarobi District, Afghanistan.

For two hours, some 200 mourners packed the Mt. Zion African Methodist Episcopal Church to remember Curry, who spent 20 years of his life in the Army and was assigned to the 173rd Airborne Brigade at Caserma Ederle in Vicenza, Italy. They described him as a remarkable man of character, compassion and commitment — to his family and to his troops.

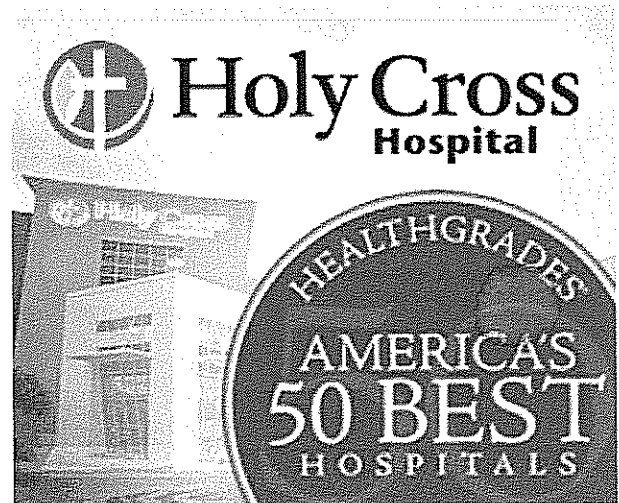
"Michael is a person that knew exactly what he wanted to do," said childhood friend Daryle Franklin. "He never let me down, and he wasn't going to let our country down."

Curry served in Iraq for 14 months before receiving orders to deploy to Afghanistan in March.

On Saturday, Curry was honored with the rites of a departed hero. A procession of several dozen motorcycles of the Patriot Guard Riders — a national organization of motorcyclists who attend the funerals of fallen U.S. troops — brought his family to the church.

Inside, mourners were greeted with a picture of Curry, smiling and clad in his Army fatigues. Dozens of tiny American flags decorated the flower arrangements along the altar.

Beneath the picture was a fallen soldier memorial made up of Curry's helmet and dog tags hanging from



a rifle that stood between Curry's boots. His remains, now at Dover Air Force Base in Delaware, will be transported to Italy, where he lived with his wife, Lucia, and sons Taylor, 12, and Kevin, 9. He wanted to be buried there, said his brother Jeffrey Green.

In the pews were cousins and aunts, childhood friends and fellow paratroopers, war veterans and total strangers — all trying to keep their composure as friends and family recalled Curry's life. Some rose to their feet, clapping and swaying to patriotic songs.

"Michael simply had a heart of gold," said Curry's sister, Niki Martin, who at times sobbed openly. "He had a heart that wanted to make a difference in the world."

Friends and relatives remembered Curry as a selfless, unassuming man — the kind who never raised his voice or cursed, and who believed in helping others.

The mourners chuckled as Martin recounted how her big brother, whom she called Lil' Mike, would walk her and their siblings to a store after school, "and like little ducklings, lead us back home and make us watch 'Starsky and Hutch,'" she said.

When Mike took a job at a Winn-Dixie, he insisted on giving \$10 from his paycheck to each of his two sisters as an allowance, she said.

After the memorial service, an Army honor guard fired a three-gun volley outside the church. Buglers played the mournful notes of taps. Inside the church, the organist played *God Bless America*. Members of the 173rd Airborne Brigade Association, Veterans of Foreign Wars, Patriot Guard Riders and American Legion Post 209 stood at attention.

As the mourners paid their final respects, the U.S. Department of Defense announced Saturday that another South Florida soldier, Army Pfc. Alfred H. Jairala, 29, of Hialeah, had been killed when an improvised explosive detonated near his vehicle July 31 in Baghdad, Iraq.

Speaking at Curry's memorial, Command Sgt. Maj. Earl Rice recalled Curry's dedication to his mission, and pledged to do everything in his power to fulfill the late sergeant's wish to get the troops serving under him home safely.

"He was always taking care of his soldiers," Rice said. "He was a man of principle who believed deeply in what he was doing."

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