

Grant Allen Dampier

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Contributed by: tomw

[Milwaukee Journal Sentinel](#) -- Grant Dampier's children were probably the best thing that ever happened to him, his wife said Tuesday.

Before his first daughter, Alexis, came along five years ago, the former wrestler from Merrill High School was mostly iIm startingnto hanging out with his buddies and having fun, Heidi Dampier said.



After his second daughter, Starr, was born a year later, nothing brought her husband more joy than taking the girls fishing on the Wisconsin River, and after his daughter, Kylee, was born last year, he decided to do something special for them by joining the U.S. Army.

"He joined so his kids would look up to him," Heidi Dampier said Tuesday after learning that her husband had been killed in Iraq the day before.

"He wanted to be their hero."

Pfc. Grant Allen Dampier, 25, was one of two U.S. soldiers killed Monday when a roadside bomb blew up near the vehicle they were traveling in during combat patrol operations in Baghdad, the U.S. Defense Department said.

Both soldiers were assigned to the 1st Battalion, 8th Infantry Regiment, 3rd Heavy Brigade Combat Team, Fort Carson, Colo.

"He really loved his kids," Heidi Dampier said in a telephone interview.

"Right now they know that they're not going to see him," she said, "but I don't think they know yet for how long."

Born in Wisconsin Rapids

Grant Dampier was born in Wisconsin Rapids, where he wrestled in grade school, and came to Merrill when his family moved as he was beginning high school, his wife said.

He joined the Merrill High School wrestling Bluejays, competing at a weight of between 150 and 160 pounds, she said.

"He was pretty skinny," Heidi Dampier recalled of the time the two first dated.

They went their separate ways soon after but reunited after high school, she said.

Before joining the Army, Grant Dampier worked for Marathon Electric in Wausau and enjoyed the Green Bay Packers, hip-hop music and the Crandon Brush Run off-road truck races in Forest County.

He also took an interest in his wife's 7-year-old cousin, Justin Peterson, and treated the boy like a son, she said.

"He would take him places and they would play video games and wrestle and do all the boy stuff," she said.

Planned for his return

Her husband was deployed to Iraq in December, and she last spoke with him on Mother's Day, she said.

"We talked about the kids and plans for when he came home," Heidi Dampier said before pondering what she will tell her children about their dad as they grow up.

"I'll tell them that he joined the Army for them," she said. "He just wanted to make them proud."

Dampier is the third confirmed fatality among Wisconsin service members in Iraq this month and the 56th since the war began.

On May 5, Nathan J. Vacho, 29, a sergeant with the U.S. Army Reserve from Ladysmith, was killed in Baghdad when an improvised explosive device detonated near the Humvee he was in.

On Thursday, Eric D. Clark, 22, an Army specialist from Pleasant Prairie, was killed by a roadside bomb in Baghdad.

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