

Army Cpl. Justin D. Ross

Died March 26, 2011 Serving During Operation Enduring Freedom

22, of Green Bay, Wis.; assigned to 863rd Engineer Battalion, Army Reserve, Wausau, Wis.; died March 26 in Saubalgay, Afghanistan, of wounds suffered when his unit was attacked by small-arms fire.

Son of preacher killed in Afghan firefight

By Steve Contorno

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An Army Reserve soldier from Green Bay died March 26 during action in Afghanistan.

Spc. Justin D. Ross, 22, was shot and killed when his unit came under fire from insurgents in Helmand province, said Lt. Col. Nathan Banks of the 364th Public Affairs Operations Center.

He was assigned to the 863rd Engineer Battalion of Wausau. His unit specializes in route clearance, the first soldiers to enter an area before more units move in.

Ross was promoted posthumously to corporal.

A spokesman for New Freedom Church in Howard said that its pastor, Ron Ross, and his wife, Debbie, flew to Dover Air Force Base, Del., on March 27 for the return of their son's body.

"Being this soon into the grieving process, you are still in shock," said Gerald Heins, the assistant pastor at New Freedom. "You are still trying to make sense of it, trying to understand what happened."

Justin Ross was a 2007 graduate of Bay Port High School and joined the military Oct. 26, 2007.

Ross was deployed in August 2010 and has been in Afghanistan since October. His unit was scheduled to return between August and September.

While the investigation into Ross' death is ongoing, preliminary reports say his unit came under small arms fire from insurgents while on a route clearance mission. Ross was the only casualty, and the first of his unit.

"[Route clearance] is a dangerous job soldiers do day in, day out," Banks said. "They clear obstacles for soldiers to get past and carry on their mission. These guys encounter fire every day."

Ross' unit had high praise for their fallen brother, Banks said.

"He was an outstanding soldier. He loved to be in the Army and he loved what he did and he loved working with his fellow soldiers," Banks said. "His unit is going to miss him."

Heins said Ross will be remembered as a wonderful man who was proud to serve his country.

“From what I understand, he really enjoyed it,” Heins said. “He loved the guys from his squad and he enjoyed the process and the idea of being able to defend his country.”

“Our hearts and prayers go out to the family and friends of Spc. Justin Ross who lost his life serving his country yesterday in Afghanistan,” Gov. Scott Walker said in a statement. “We hope that they are able to take some measure of comfort in knowing that he is a Wisconsin hero.”

Before leaving for Delaware, Ron Ross wrote on his Facebook page, “We thank God for freedom and all those ... who have paid the ultimate price. We are proud of you Justin!”

Material from The Associated Press contributed to this report.
