
'Now I see what freedom costs,' soldier's brother says

By Paul Srubas

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GREEN BAY, Wis. — Silence fell on the crowd of 700-plus mourners gathered outside First Assembly of God Church as the name of Cpl. Justin Ross was called once, twice, three times.

The symbolic roll call for members of Ross' Army unit opened a somber military honors funeral for the 22-year-old Howard soldier, who was killed March 26 in Afghanistan.

Seven soldiers fired a three-volley rifle salute and another played "Taps" while six honor guards folded the American flag that had draped Ross' casket. Brig. Gen. Charles Martin of the 372nd Engineering Brigade of Fort Snelling, Minn., presented the flag to Ross' family.

"Now I see what freedom costs; I won't take that for granted," Ross' brother, Nathan Ross, told well-wishers.

Ross, the son of the Rev. Ron and Debbie Ross, was on a route-clearing mission when his unit came under small-arms fire. Ross was the only U.S. casualty.

The two-hour funeral on April 4 was held at First Assembly rather than at Ross's father's church, the New Freedom Church in Howard, to accommodate the hundreds of friends, family members and fellow soldiers who turned out to pay their respects.

Ross's grandfather, the Rev. Robert Ross of Montana, told the congregation the loss of his grandson was like the trials and tribulations thrust upon Jacob and Job of the Bible's Old Testament.

The challenge is to understand that "for some things, there are no human answers," Robert Ross said. "We have to leave this place and say, 'God is still God' ... and I'm not going to allow my spirit to become bitter."

First Sgt. Derek Andrasic presented 10 posthumous military awards to Ross, including the Bronze Star, Purple Heart and Meritorious Service medals.

"In a theater of war, the safest place to be is right behind us, the 428th, whose motto is 'clear the way,' " Andrasic said. "Justin Ross will be right with us, leading the way, clearing the way for us."

Following the funeral, a bagpiper played "Amazing Grace" while an honor guard carried Ross' casket to a temporary shelter outside the church. At least 50 elementary school children gathered on the sidewalk across the street from the ceremony to watch.

Ron Ross said his family was awestruck by the outpouring of community support.

Ross will be buried at Arlington National Cemetery.
