

"He was my first friend in Vesper, and he became my best friend throughout grade school," Hamel said.

The two played Little League baseball at Vesper Elementary, Hamel at first base and Tillery in right field, and spent hours at Tillery's house playing with military figurines, Hamel said.

"He had a great imagination," Hamel said.

"It was never boring hanging out with him."

"He was just an all-around great guy," he said. "He could be one of the best friends any person could have."

When Hamel's father, Dave Hamel, operated a farm in Vesper about six summers ago, Tillery helped him bale hay and plant trees.

"He was very respectful, very polite," Dave Hamel said.

Hamel recalled Tillery telling him of his plans to join the Marines at the boys' June 2005 graduation from Wisconsin Rapids' Lincoln High School.

"It was something he wanted to do," Hamel said.

Jesse Tillery signed up for the Marines during his senior year, his father said, and shipped out for training at Camp Lejeune in August 2005.

While in Iraq, Jim Tillery was attached to a medical unit and served on a helicopter. His brother Jared now works in supply, Martin Tillery said.

His youngest son was driving an amphibious assault vehicle when it was struck by an improvised explosive device, his father said.

Jesse Tillery is the 64th Wisconsin service member killed in Iraq.

"We are proud of him, very, very proud of him," his father said.

"We are proud of all of our sons."

Jesse Tillery is also survived by a sister, Joelle Mayers, and his mother, Kathy.

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