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State soldier was always ready for challenge

His death is Wisconsin's first this year in Iraq

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When Matthew Tyler Grimm joined his cousin's racing team in the summer of 2004, it was his first experience working with the high-performance stock cars that were the backbone of the American Speed Association.

That fall, he joined another team, the U.S. Army, where he learned about tanks and artillery.

"He was always ready to take on a new challenge," 1995 ASA champion Bryan Reffner said Tuesday after learning that his cousin had died in Iraq the day before.

The 21-year-old Army specialist, who was a member of C Company, 2/7 Cavalry in Fort Bliss, Texas, was killed when the vehicle in which he was riding was struck by a roadside bomb, his mother, Jean Grimm, said Tuesday.

She did not know where her son was killed, but said he had been in Iraq since late October and until a week ago had been stationed in Mosul.

"He laughed and smiled a lot," Jean Grimm said. "He was friends with everyone, and he really enjoyed life."

According to his mother, Matthew Grimm entered the Army the fall after graduating from Lincoln High School, where he played football, wrestled, dabbled in weightlifting and met an Army recruiter.

"I guess (the Army) just looked interesting to him," said Jean Grimm, whose other son, Andrew, 23, is serving in Iraq as a specialist with the Wisconsin National Guard.

"He didn't really know what he wanted to do yet."

Shane Benitz, an assistant wrestling coach at Lincoln who worked with Grimm in his sophomore year, described him as a "powerhouse" wrestler with a muscular frame.