



Spc. Brandon J. Rowe

Soldier from Roscoe dies

20-year-old Brandon Rowe is the area's first Iraq war death.

April 2, 2003
Rockford Register Star

A 20-year-old Roscoe resident became the Rock River Valley's first death in the war against Iraq.

Army Spc. Brandon Rowe was killed Monday in an ambush near the Iraqi city of Najaf, his family said Tuesday. Rowe is the first person from the 101st Airborne Division to die in combat in the Iraq war.

A soldier came to the house Monday evening to notify the family of his death. A bullet entered underneath Rowe's arm where armor could not protect him, said his mother, Wendy Borowski.

A flag flew at half-staff outside the family's home in the Ledges subdivision. A row of vehicles lined the family's driveway. Brent Rowe, 25, of Chicago talked briefly with the media Tuesday on the family's porch about his brother.

He said Brandon was the youngest of four siblings. Brandon Rowe was a 2000 graduate of Hononegah High School in Rockton, and he enlisted in the military shortly after graduation. Brent Rowe was not certain when his brother's body would be returned to the United States.

A neighbor took the news of Brandon Rowe's death hard.

"I'm very angry right now," said Kim Fields. "It was so senseless.



Brent Rowe talks Wednesday about his memories of his brother Brandon

"All of their children have baby-sat for me. They are just very nice kids, and Brandon was very proud of what he was doing."

Josh Weidman, 21, attended Hononegah with Rowe. He described Rowe as his best friend when they attended elementary school.

Weidman remembered playing "Army" and with GI Joes. Weidman was not surprised to learn that his friend joined the military after high school.

When they were growing up, Rowe was "one of the funniest kids I ever met," Weidman said. He recalled an incident in second grade when Rowe made him laugh so hard that he fell off the lunch table.

"I don't remember what it was. ... He was making me laugh, I leaned back, and there was no back on the lunch table. I grabbed onto him and took him down with me."

Weidman heard of his friend's death on Monday. He and his father went through old photographs of the two buddies. There was one at Chuck E Cheese's, at a birthday for Weidman.

"I just remember that we were really hot and sweaty from running around. His cheeks were always red. He was one of my favorite friends."



Wendy Borowski displays a recent photo and her last letter from her son, Brandon Rowe

Family shares thoughts

Family members say it could be a week before Brandon Rowe's body is returned home.

April 3, 2003
Rockford Register Star

ROSCOE — The mother of Army Spc. Brandon Rowe said she supported the United States' mission in Iraq when the attacks began on March 19. Two days after her 20-year-old son was killed in combat, she said nothing has changed.

Rowe's mother, Wendy Borowski, and her family welcomed an endless stream of print and television media from as far as Chicago into their two-story home Wednesday in the Ledges.

Inside the foyer, the family displayed photos of Rowe and a handwritten letter from him dated March 10. It arrived at the family's home March 23.

It was one of the last times Rowe communicated with them.

"He was prepared to go," his older brother, Brent, said. "He believed in his training and his mission. He truly felt he was helping people in Iraq. Since his death, it hasn't changed anything about how we feel."

Rowe was a 2000 graduate of Hononegah High School and a member of the 101st Airborne Division, a rapid deployment force based in Fort Campbell, Ky., the largest aviation brigade in the Army.

He died Monday in combat near Najaf, Iraq. He was shot under his arm where armor could not protect him.

Military personnel arrived at the family's home Monday evening and informed the family of Rowe's death.

"It was either a bullet or shrapnel," said Brent Rowe, 25, of Chicago. "They told us it was indirect fire, but I'm not sure what that means."

Brent Rowe said Army officials told the family it will be at least five to seven days before the body is returned to the United States. The body will be flown to Germany first, he said.

Funeral arrangements will be made once the body is returned. Brent Rowe said it will be a military funeral.



**Wendy and Rick Borowski talk about her son Brandon.
Rick is Brandon's stepfather**

Motorists who take a drive along Elevator Road can see that the community is sharing the family's pain. The marquee outside the Maranatha Assembly of God Church reads: "Roscoe mourns the loss of Spc. Brandon Rowe."

A sign outside the Roscoe Township office reads: "Remember Brandon Rowe. He gave his life for our freedom."

Bea Streeter, a bartender and Ladies Auxiliary member of the Roscoe VFW Post 2955, said a collection was started Wednesday.

"We're just trying to do something for the family," Streeter said.

In Rockton, Hononegah High School's school flag flew at half-staff.

Rowe's father, Milton, lives in Elkhorn City, Ky. During a telephone interview, he said he talked to his son just days before he departed in early March to Iraq.

"We talked for a half an hour, and I told him how much we loved him and cared about him and how proud we are of him."

Milton Rowe said the family tried on more than one occasion to talk Brandon Rowe out of joining the armed services, but his mind was made up.

"To me, he was just a baby with a pack on his back in the desert in the hot sun trying to do a man's job. He was a man inside, but he was my baby boy," said Milton Rowe.

Milton Rowe said he has been in constant contact with family in Illinois since his son's death. He said the family struggled over whether to talk to the media about Brandon Rowe's short life.

"We just decided what better way is there for people to remember him than to talk about him," Milton Rowe said.

"I hope his sacrifice of his precious life is worth the cause and the reasons that we are over there. We have to trust the judgment of our leaders. He was a beautiful young boy and we loved him. He had his whole life in front of him."



**This sign on Elevator Road near Roscoe, Illinois pays tribute to
Brandon J. Rowe**



**Wendy Borowski wears a portrait of her son,
Spc. Brandon J. Rowe**

'A cause he believed in'

Family mourns soldier who was proud to be on front line

April 3, 2003

Milwaukee Journal Sentinel

When Brent Rowe remembers his little brother, Brandon, he thinks of a brown-haired 5-year-old singing "I Heard It Through the Grapevine" along with the California Raisins.

"He made a microphone out of a pencil and tinfoil. It was the funniest thing you ever saw, a little kid doing that," Brent Rowe said Wednesday, less than 48 hours after he learned his 20-year-old brother had been killed in Iraq.

When Wendy Borowski remembers Brandon, her youngest son, she sees him as a high school graduate, poised to join the Army.

"I tried to talk him out of it. I was terrified," she said. "Then he said infantry, and I tried to convince him to do something else."

She suggested Brandon join the Air Force, like his other brother, 23-year-old Kevin. Then she tried to steer her baby toward the Navy - anything but the 101st Airborne Division, the unit known for being on the front lines of nearly every war in recent U.S. history: World War II. Vietnam. The first Gulf War.

But there was no changing Brandon's mind.

"He was proud of that," his mother said. "We all are."

The Army seemed just the thing to help Brandon come of age after growing up in the small town of Roscoe, just across the Illinois border from Beloit. Brandon was the quiet one, often overshadowed by his two older brothers and older sister. He was the laid-back, reserved baby of the family, trying to get a word in edgewise as his siblings stole the spotlight.



Brent Rowe (right) and his stepfather, Rick Borowski, both of Roscoe, Illinois, look over photos of Spc. Brandon J. Rowe

When a friend from high school joined the Army, Brandon saw a way to break out of his shell - and to earn money to study computers in college, his family said. He enlisted for a three-year tour in June 2001. His brother Kevin already was in the Air Force.

"They did have a certain bond because they both went through basic training," said Brent Rowe, 25. "You know, everything in the military is abbreviations, and they'd be talking back and forth in that code, and I wouldn't know what they were talking about."

Kevin Rowe remains stateside, stationed at Edwards Air Force Base in California.

The body of Brandon Rowe, an Army specialist and machine gunner who was trained to rappel from Black Hawk helicopters, is expected to be returned to Illinois within five to seven days.

Even after a visit from an Army representative Wednesday afternoon, details of what happened to him remained sketchy for Brandon's family. They know he was hit Monday by indirect fire - "what that means, I'm not sure," his brother said. A piece of shrapnel hit an exposed area of Brandon's chest just under the arm, an area his protective vest didn't cover.

"I heard he was on a tank, but I'm not sure," Brent Rowe said.

Brandon's loved ones do know that he wasn't afraid to die, and that he was dedicated to his mission.

"We'd talked about the things we saw on TV, the things Saddam Hussein was doing to his own people, and he'd say, 'That's terrible. I can't imagine living like that. It's so wrong,' " his mother said.

"I hate throwing this word around, but he's our hero," his brother added. "He died for a cause he believed in and we all believe in. He truly believed he was helping the people over there. He wouldn't have done it otherwise."



The U.S. and the Army Airborne flags fly at half-staff outside the Roscoe, Illinois home of Brandon Rowe

Brandon was deployed March 3, with just two days' notice. His mother and aunts went to his base, Fort Campbell, Ky., just before he shipped out. They videotaped the visit.

They treasure that video now, as well as a message Brandon left on their answering machine last week when no one was home.

They cherish, too, the only letter they've received from Brandon since his deployment, mailed March 10 from Kuwait. He enclosed photos: his friends playing poker, his crowded olive drab tent, himself in front of a flagpole, clutching his machine gun - nicknamed "the saw." Brandon wrote of the interesting Kuwaitis, the rundown cities and the streets clogged with cars that were "just like ours." He asked for a care package of the typical supplies: foot powder, beef jerky, hand sanitizer.

"I have everything I need mostly, but send that stuff for a treat."

Brandon also asked his family to send letters and care packages to a friend who hadn't gotten much mail - a request his family said was typical of his caring, unselfish nature.

"I love you and I hope to hear from you soon," Brandon wrote at the end of the letter. "I'll write as much as I can."

Then he signed off: "Wish me luck. Bye."



Brandon J. Rowe
at a birthday party in this undated photograph

Brandon Jacob Rowe

Brandon Jacob Rowe, 20, of Roscoe, IL, beloved son, brother, stepson, grandson, devoted friend, and brave soldier died in combat in the service of his country, on March 31, 2003 in Iraq. He was born April 14, 1982 in Rockford, IL, the son of Wendy Borowski and Milton Rowe. Brandon was a 2000 graduate of Hononegah High School. He had worked at DiGiovanni's Restaurant and Highlander Supermarket in Roscoe while in school. He attended Rock Valley College before enlisting in the U.S. Army in 2001. Brandon was deployed to the Middle East with the 101st Airborne Division (Air Assault) out of Ft. Campbell, KY, on March 3, 2003. Brandon's ambition was to attend college to study computers after completion of his military service. He was a Chicago Bears and Kentucky Wildcats fan. He enjoyed playing computer games and listening to music, and especially spending time with his "buds." Brandon will be deeply missed by his family and friends. He enriched the lives of so many while he was with us, and his death touched the lives of many, many more. His sweet, loving and compassionate nature and sense of humor blessed all who were privileged to know him. Survivors include his mother and stepfather, Wendy and Rick Borowski of Roscoe, IL; father, Milton Rowe of Elkhorn City, KY; sister, Leah (Doug Yates) Rowe of Roscoe, IL; brothers, Brent (Burgundy) Rowe of Chicago, IL, and Kevin (Mandy) Rowe of Edwards AFB, CA; maternal grandfather, George Scheidegger of Rockton, IL; paternal grandmother, Tennessee (Rush) Sanders of Elkhorn City, KY; step grandparents, Frank and Jean Borowski of Rockford, IL, special nephews, Devon Scheidegger of Roscoe and Austin Wheat of St. Louis; numerous aunts, uncles, cousins, and many special friends, including Nicol Paige. He was predeceased by his maternal grandmother, Gwen Scheidegger of Rockton and paternal grandfather, Millis Rowe of Kentucky. Visitation will be 10am-4pm Saturday, April 12, in the Hononegah High School Performing Arts Center, 307 Salem St., Rockton, IL. The family will be present from 2-4pm. A memorial service to honor Brandon will follow 4pm in Hononegah High School with Cordell Cannon officiating. Burial will be in Willwood Burial Park Rockford, IL. Daley-Murphy-Wisch & Associates Funeral Home, Beloit, WI, assisted the family. Memorial donations may be made to the Brandon Rowe Memorial Fund, c/o any Amcore Bank, which will be used to help support the troops stationed at Fort Campbell and their families. Guest book at Legacy.com



Flags were lowered to half staff at Hononegah High School Saturday during the memorial service for Brandon J. Rowe of Roscoe, Illinois. Rowe was a 2000 Hononegah graduate



The body of Spc. Brandon J. Rowe of Roscoe, Illinois is carried inside the Performing Arts Center at Hononegah High School in Rockton in preparation for his memorial service Saturday



Wendy and Rick Borowski enter Hononegah High School's Performing Arts Center Saturday for the memorial service of Wendy's son, Brandon J. Rowe.



A mourner stops Saturday in front of the casket of Spc. Brandon J. Rowe of Roscoe, Illinois during visitation at Hononegah High School.

Fallen soldier mourned

Family, friends and strangers attend services for Brandon Rowe, whose Purple Heart was given to his mother.

April 13, 2003

Rockford Register Star

ROCKTON — Brandon Rowe, the area's first death in the war with Iraq, was remembered as "a great courageous American soldier" and a smiling young man whose "goodness drew people to him" at a memorial service Saturday, two days before what would have been his 21st birthday.

More than 250 family members, friends and strangers who knew him only through media reports gathered at the Performing Arts Center at Hononegah High School to pay their last respects to Rowe, killed March 31 in an ambush near the Iraqi city of Najaf.

Army Maj. Gen. Robert Clark presented Rowe's Purple Heart to his mother, Wendy Borowski. It's the nation's oldest military honor and among the highest. A full honor guard escorted Rowe's flag-draped casket to and from the high school stage.

"We are all safer this very day because of Brandon Rowe and his military compatriots," Clark told the crowd of mourners before bestowing the Purple Heart on behalf of President Bush.

"What an honorable and inspirational young hero he was."

Rowe's receipt of the Purple Heart marked perhaps the most solemn moment of a subdued and emotionally reserved hourlong tribute. Mourners sang "God Bless America," watched a video farewell Rowe taped before departing for Iraq and heard his sister and two brothers reminisce.

Flags flew at half-staff in front of businesses and homes on the clear, sunny afternoon. The girls' varsity soccer team took on Burlington Central High School as the memorial for Rowe, a 2000 graduate, took place.



Color guard members Staff Sgt. Michael Bennett (right), and Spc. Michael Sheffield salute the coffin of Spc. Brandon J. Rowe of Roscoe, Illinois as they are relieved of duty by Adalburto Hernandez (left) and Spc. Michael McGill Saturday

"We are all vitally aware of the seriousness of the day and how strange it is for us to be cheering at a soccer game," said Pat Prieve of Roscoe, rooting for her daughter, Becky, in a 0-0 standoff with six minutes left to play.

"When they played the National Anthem, it was especially meaningful and brought tears to many eyes. His death touches all of us whether we knew the family or not."

Driving into Rockton, mourners passed a tribute to Rowe outside Melissa Carlson's ranch home at the intersection of Hononegah and Dorr roads. Carlson inserted scores of styrofoam cups into her chain-link fence to form the message: "BRANDON ROWE! WE WILL NOT FORGET ..."

Cups in the shape of a heart followed the exclamation point. Just like Prieve, Carlson didn't know Rowe or his family.

"It's so sad. It hit so close to home," said Carlson, inside relaxing as the 4 p.m. service was about to begin. "I just wanted to show everyone coming from Roscoe that people care."

Mourners had come and gone since 10 a.m. for the visitation, many arriving with a small photo of Rowe pinned against a red, white and blue ribbon. Inside, photo displays chronicled Rowe's life from infancy to senior prom to his short but promising military career.

John Stone and Josh Weidman had been best friends with Rowe since second grade. They played basketball, rode bikes and stayed up late watching movies together.

Both are struggling to come to grips with Rowe's death.

"It didn't hit me until I was watching the news and saw a letter that Brandon wrote to his mom," Weidman said.

"He had the same handwriting that he had when he was little. That's when it all hit me that it was real."

Others, like Karen Lewis of Rockton, never met Rowe but felt compelled to honor the soldier and his tragic sacrifice.

"I look at my two boys and they're so young," said Lewis, her 15-year-old son, Eric, at her side. "That's the hardest thing, his age."



Mike McDermott of Poplar Grove looks over a table of memories of Brandon Rowe in Rockton, Illinois. McDermott worked in the meat department with Brandon at Hilander grocery.

Rowe's closed casket sat on stage while two honor guards stood watch during the six-hour visitation. A dramatic 18-by-34-foot U.S. flag hung behind the casket, and nine floral arrangements lined the stage, several made up of white gladiolas, red carnations and blue bows.

Yellow ribbons adorned the aisles.

Rowe's brother, Brent, gave the first eulogy. He drew laughs with a story about Brandon, the youngest of four, singing Marvin Gaye's "I Heard It Through the Grapevine," with a tinfoil-topped pencil microphone when Rowe was in kindergarten. Brent explained that at the time, the California Raisins were popular in TV advertising.

Brent also told a humorous take about the time during Brandon's adolescence when he and a few unnamed accomplices racked up \$600 in telephone charges to 900 numbers. The same brother had a spiritual side; he prayed 10 minutes before and 10 minutes after midnight on New Year's Eve.

"He was my short little brother," Brent said, "but he was one hell of a man."

Brandon's sister, Leah, said her brother valued his family and looked up especially to one of his grandfathers, a World War II paratrooper who also won a Purple Heart.

"His goodness drew people to him," she said.

Kevin Rowe, an Air Force hydraulics specialist, read from two letters his brother sent home from Iraq.

In one, Brandon described flat, barren countryside and poor cities with run-down, tightly compacted buildings. He asked for beef jerky, foot powder, gum and hard candy. He also asked for family members to write to a fellow soldier who didn't seem to receive much mail.

In the other, Brandon wrote that he was "thankful ... to have a loving family and loving friends" and that he couldn't wait to come home.

"This is the largest step I've taken in my life. So far it's been OK. The path ahead of me is my greatest test. But I'm not alone. You have given me the strength to make it a safe one."



Brent (left) and Kevin Rowe leave the family press conference after the memorial service for their brother, Brandon



Maj. Gen. Robert Clark of the U.S. Army addresses the media after the memorial service for Brandon J. Rowe.

Rowe's family played a video of Brandon shot a week before he shipped out.

"Don't worry about me," said a camera-shy Brandon, pressing a water bottle against the back of his neck.

Clark noted that Rowe advanced to specialist ahead of his peers and served as one of two machine gunners for his infantry troop in the 101st Airborne Division. Holding the position meant, that Rowe was "physically tough and absolutely reliable."

Among dignitaries who attended were U.S. Rep. Don Manzullo, R-Egan, and state Sen. Dave Syverson, R-Rockford.

"It was very moving," said Syverson, who left the service in tears and with a quivering voice.

"As a parent, I can't imagine the pain of having to bury a child. But I sure could sense the pride the family had in him. There was a sense of loss, but there also was pride that he was a leader."

Family members spoke at a press conference after the memorial, where Kevin Rowe was asked what he wants people to remember about Brandon.

"What I would want them to remember is the sacrifice my brother made was for other people. And I think we could all learn from his example. Putting others first and bonding with your family and friends," Kevin said. "I'm just proud of the choices he made during his time on Earth."



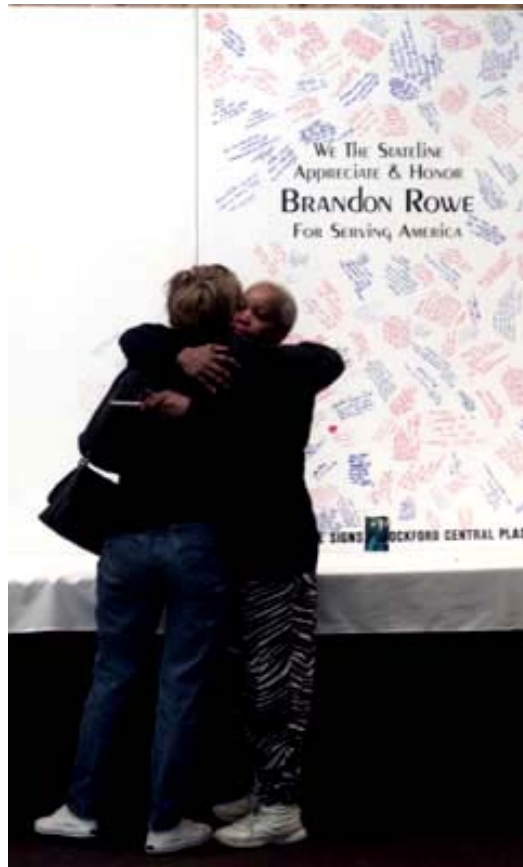
**Kevin Rowe and his wife, Mandy, leave the memorial service for
Kevin's brother Brandon**



Mourners leave the Performing Arts Center in Rockton, Illinois after the memorial service for Brandon J. Rowe



U.S. Rep. Don Manzullo, R-Egan, pauses for a moment while describing the Brandon J. Rowe memorial service Saturday.



Sherri Tate of Rockford, hugs Geri Ballano of Roscoe during the visitation of Brandon J. Rowe. The service was held at Hononegah High School in Rockton, Illinois

"When I saw he was coming home, I felt compelled to show my respect," Tate said.

Spc. Brandon J. Rowe

April 11, 2004

The Leaf-Chronicle

Rowe, 20, of Roscoe, Ill., was killed March 31, 2003, by enemy artillery fire near the town of Ayyub, Iraq. Rowe was assigned to Company C, 1st Battalion, 502nd Infantry Regiment.

Rowe joined the Army to help pay for college but found a mission and grew into a man.

"I was so amazed at how he grew and the strength that he had. He was so proud of what he accomplished," said his mother, Wendy Borowski, who had figured Brandon was the least likely of her four children to join the service.

"He was a very caring, sensitive person," Borowski said. "He was always smiling. Everybody liked him because he was just fun to be around."

Rowe's father, Milton Rowe of Elkhorn City, Ky., said he had once tried to talk his son out of joining the 101st Airborne Division.

"I said 'Son, why don't you join one of the other services,'" Rowe said.

"He said 'Dad, somebody has got to do the dirty, hard work.'"



Army Spc.
Brandon Jacob
Rowe
04-14-82
03-31-03
K.I.A. Near Najaf
Iraq.
We love ^{and} miss
him terribly. Sincerely,
Wendy Borowski

To Borowskis - Coalition Memorial -
Thank you so much for
remembering all of them.

It means so much to our
family and the other families
when we have support such as
this. God Bless.

Support Our Troops, Remember the
fallen. Sincerely, (mom):
Wendy Borowski

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