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2nd war death hits area

Washington grad killed by roadside bomb in Iraq

Kristen Rasmussen
[@PensacolaNewsJournal.com](#)

The war in Iraq on Thursday claimed its second local casualty in less than two months, when a 27-year-old Pensacola native was killed by a roadside bomb.

Daniel Clay, a Washington High School graduate, was one of 10 U.S. Marines killed by an improvised explosive device near Fallujah, his family said Friday.

Although Marine officials had not released the identities of all the victims as of Friday evening, Clay's family members, who were notified of his death Thursday evening, said Friday that he was among them.

They declined further comment.

Some who knew Clay said being a Marine was one of his longtime dreams. He was a member of the Junior ROTC program at Washington and enlisted in the U.S. armed forces shortly after his graduation in 1996, said Alex Golovko, Clay's high school cross-country running coach.

"I thought (Clay) was very sharp," Golovko said. "He even looked like a Marine in high school. He was very well-disciplined."

Everett Whiteside, who also coached Clay in track and cross country at Washington, describing him as an "outstanding young man" who "earned the respect of his teammates."

"He put country and service first above everything else, and I'm sure that's the type of soldier he was," Whiteside said. "He was a natural leader."

According to the Pentagon, the roadside bomb that killed the 10 Marines and wounded 11 others -- all of whom were on foot patrol -- was fashioned from several large artillery shells.

It was the deadliest attack against American troops since August and brought to at least 2,124 the number of service members killed since the beginning of the war in March 2003.

Marine Cpl. Jonathan "J.R." Spears, 21, of Molino was the 2,000th U.S. armed forces death in Iraq and the first from the Pensacola Bay Area. He was fatally shot on Oct. 23.

In addition to Washington High, Clay also attended Scenic Heights Elementary and Ferry Pass Middle schools, a childhood friend said. The son of Sara Jo and Bud Clay, Daniel Clay has three surviving sisters, the youngest of whom, Katy Clay, graduated from the U.S. Naval Academy in 2003. A fourth sister died last year.

Clay and his wife resided in California. It was not immediately known whether the couple have any children.

"All he ever talked about was joining the military," said Chris Smith, 27, who became friends with Clay when they were in second grade. "He was always going the extra mile to get things done for his friends. He was absolutely a great guy."

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Then Sgt. Daniel Clay, second from right, was present for a document signing with Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld in July 2003. Also pictured are: from left, Rumsfeld, U.S. Congressman Henry Brown, R-S.C., Joint Chiefs of Staff vice chairman Gen. Peter Pace, Sgt. Major John Estrada, Clay and Lisa Clay.
Photo courtesy of Department of Defense

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