

Kevin Shawn Rux

U.S. Navy, Petty Officer First Class

1969 - 2000

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Kevin Shawn Rux in an official Navy portrait. The small symbol on his sleeve above the red chevrons indicates his specialty in electronic warfare. U.S. Navy

On October 12, 2000, seventeen men were tragically killed in the bombing of the United States Navy destroyer *USS Cole* (DDG-67) in Aden, Yemen. Among them was thirty-year-old Sailor Kevin Shawn Rux, one of the first American patriots to lose his life in what has since come to be called the “War on Terror.”

Kevin Rux was born on October 31, 1969, in San Diego, California. His parents had met in West Virginia, married, and moved across the U.S. throughout Kevin’s early childhood as a result of his father’s Navy career. When Kevin was in sixth or seventh grade, the family moved to Portland, North Dakota, at which time his father retired. Kevin went to high school at nearby Mayville, where he enjoyed participating in the wrestling team before graduating from Mayville-Portland High School in 1988.

His parents eventually split up, and Kevin and his siblings moved back to Harrison County, West Virginia to live with their mother, Sandra Flanagan. She describes Kevin as a jokester, outgoing, and very honest. He loved to dance and sing karaoke. As the eldest, Kevin was a role model for his younger brothers Ken, Tom, Mat, and Tim.

Kevin Rux first enlisted in the U.S. Navy on October 24, 1988, shortly after completing high school. He served for a decade, during which time he participated in Operation Desert Shield in 1990. In 1989-1991, he served aboard the frigate *USS Taylor* (FFG-50) as an Electronic Warfare Specialist overseeing the ship’s radar and communication equipment. He was assigned to a new berth aboard a destroyer, *USS Deyo* (DD 989), from October 1991 until October 1994. Next, he served as submarine

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USS Cole (DDG-67), an Arleigh Burke class destroyer commissioned in 1996, only four years before the deadly terrorist attack. The ship is named for Marine Darrell S. Cole, who was killed on Iwo Jima in 1945. Naval History and Heritage Command

bay security at Naval Submarine Base, New London, Connecticut, from January 1995 to January 1998. At this point, Kevin decided to leave the military and return to civilian life.

For about a year, Kevin was employed as a civilian police officer in Bridgeport, Connecticut. But in 1999, he decided to reenlist. He was assigned to the *USS Cole*.

On October 12, 2000, operatives of the al-Qaeda terrorist organization detonated a bomb alongside the *USS Cole* while the ship was refueling in Aden, Yemen. Concealed in small boat that pulled alongside the unwitting destroyer, the bomb was set off by two suicide bombers who perished in the explosion. The blast tore into the *Cole* amidships on the port side, killing seventeen sailors and wounding thirty-nine more.

The effects of the attack on the *Cole* were profound and far-reaching. In the following months, U.S. intelligence agencies increasingly uncovered al-Qaeda's international activities. According to some sources, al-Qaeda leader Osama Bin Laden was frustrated that the attack did not provoke a more strident American military response, which he hoped would bring about a larger conflict in the Middle East. Bin Laden later orchestrated the September 11, 2001 destruction of the World Trade Center to accomplish this end. Following those tragic events, the United States government linked the two attacks and announced its "Global War on Terror" to target the group and its affiliates wherever they operated, spawning two decades of American military involvement in Afghanistan and Iraq.

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Despite heavy damage, the *USS Cole* remained afloat. After several days of repairs, and with a huge investigation roiling around her, the destroyer was loaded onto a transport ship, the *MV Blue Marlin*, and sent to Mississippi for repairs. The vessel returned to duty in 2003 and, as of 2022, continues in active service.

An ocean away, Kevin's wife Olivia learned of the *Cole*'s tragic fate on the news. It took five days for the U.S. Navy to identify Rux's remains and inform his family, during which time they waited in suspense. Rux was a Petty Officer at the time of his death, but was awarded the rank of Electronics Warfare Technician First Class (EW1) posthumously. The other commendations from his service include a Purple Heart, Combat Action Ribbon, Navy Unit Commendation, the Joint Meritorious Unit Award, the National Defense Service Medal, the Armed Forces Expeditionary Medal, the Southwest Asia Service Medal, the Sea Service Deployment Ribbon, and the Pistol Marksmanship Ribbon.

Kevin Shawn Rux left behind his grieving wife and siblings. His mother lives in Bridgeport, West Virginia and works to preserve his legacy. In 2014 the West Virginia Legislature voted to dedicate the "Kevin S. Rux Memorial Bridge" in Harrison County, West Virginia, so that citizens do not soon forget his service and sacrifice. As of 2018, Rux's family and friends continued to hold annual ceremonies in his honor on the date of his death. He is buried in the West Virginia National Cemetery in Pruntytown.



The *MV Blue Marlin* transports the damaged *Cole* back to the United States after the attack in Yemen.
US Navy photo

The US Navy Petty Officer 1st Class Kevin S. Rux Memorial Bridge near Bridgeport in Harrison County, West Virginia, dedicated by an act of the state legislature in 2014. A. Morton Thomas and Associates, Inc.



Sources

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Resting Place

West Virginia National Cemetery
42 Veterans Memorial Lane, Grafton, WV 26354
(304) 265-2044

Section 1
Site 1498

Date of interment: January 12, 2001

About the West Virginia National Cemeteries Project

The West Virginia National Cemeteries Project is a program of the West Virginia Humanities Council, funded in part by the Veterans Legacy Program of the Department of Veteran Affairs and initiated in 2021. All biographies produced as part of this program are composed by West Virginia high school students, who conduct original research on veterans interred at the Grafton National Cemetery or the West Virginia National Cemetery, both of which are located in or near Grafton, Taylor County, West Virginia.

As home to one of the nation's earliest National Cemeteries, the community of Grafton has longstanding traditions of honoring America's veterans, including the longest continuously celebrated Memorial Day parade in the United States. The Grafton National Cemetery, located in the heart of the city and founded in 1867, is typically the endpoint of each year's parade. When the Grafton National Cemetery began to run short of space during the 1960s, the West Virginia National Cemetery was dedicated in 1987, just a few miles outside of Grafton in the community of Pruntytown. The same National Cemetery Administration staff cares for both facilities.

The West Virginia Humanities Council is proud to thank the following organizations for their participation in the West Virginia National Cemeteries Project: West Virginia Archives and History, the West Virginia University history department, Taylor County Historical and Genealogical Society, Taylor County Public Library, and Grafton High School.

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