

Brandon Robert Sapp

U.S. Army, Private First Class

1983 - 2004

Written by Kaden Delaney and Frederique “Fred” Maloley

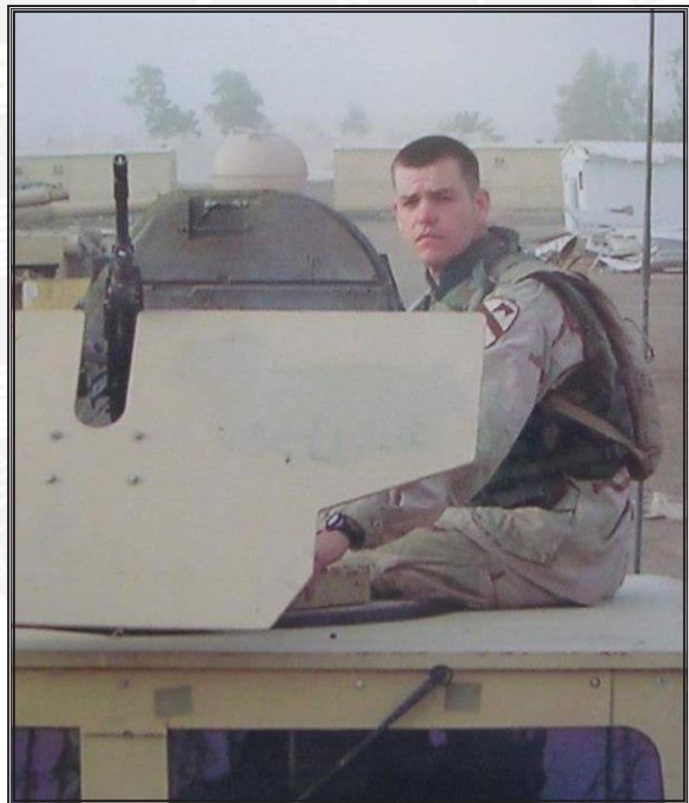
Instructed by Richard Zukowski

Brandon Robert Sapp was born on Father’s Day, June 19, 1983, in Lake Worth, Florida, the son of John Sapp and Hope Veverka. Growing up alongside his siblings Shawn, Christopher, Hailee, and Harrison, he learned to love motorcycles, electric guitar, making people laugh, and taking apart and fixing anything he could. Many who knew him described him as energetic and happy-go-lucky—a true friend.

Vacations frequently brought the Sapps to Grafton, West Virginia to visit family. Brandon hunted and fished along Tygart Lake, and as he grew up and graduated from Santaluces High School in Lantana, Florida, his father schemed to give him some property of his own in West Virginia, where the outdoorsy young man could build his own cabin.

After high school, Brandon enlisted in the U.S. Army. It wasn’t planned as a lifelong career—he intended to join law enforcement after his service, hopefully as part of a Special Weapons And Tactics (SWAT) police team. Brandon’s father John recalls that his son always “wanted to fight for what was right”.

Sapp soon joined A Troop, 2nd Battalion, 7th Cavalry Regiment (2-7), 1st Cavalry Division, based in Fort Hood, Texas. Established in 1866, the 2-7 Cavalry has a long and storied past. Its men have fought in the Indian Wars of the late 1800s, World War II, the Korean War, Vietnam War, Gulf War, and the Global War on Terror—in the latter case principally in Iraq. While they may have fought from horseback on the western plains, since World War II they have engaged America’s enemies with tanks and other armored vehicles. Despite the evolution of their mounts, cavalry soldiers are still usually referred to as “troopers” just like over a century before.



PFC Brandon Robert Sapp atop an armored vehicle in Iraq, deployed as part of Operation Iraqi Freedom.
Courtesy of John Sapp

Brandon Robert Sapp



Brandon standing atop the turret of his M2 Bradley Fighting Vehicle during his tour in Iraq.
Courtesy of John Sapp



An M2 Bradley of the 7th Cavalry in Iraq in 2005.
U.S. Army, photo by Spc. Darrick Fritz

The 7th Cavalry Regiment was part of the initial invasion of Iraq in March 2003, when U.S.-led Coalition forces advanced across the border from Kuwait. While Iraq's field armies under dictator Saddam Hussein were quickly routed, insurgent forces and irregular militias would continue to attack Coalition troops for the next two decades.

Deploying in March 2004, a year after the initial invasion, Brandon served alongside his fellow troopers in Operation Iraqi Freedom. 2-7 was posted near the city of Najaf, Iraq, a little over 100 miles south of Baghdad. U.S. and Coalition forces were fighting to secure the city from Iraqi cleric Muqtada al-Sadr's militia, a powerful force known as the Mahdi Army. The Mahdi Army was virtually unknown to Coalition commanders until April 2004, when the al-Sadr's troops staged an unexpected attack and quickly seized the Iraqi cities of Kut, Najaf, and parts of Basra.

On August 5, 2004, fighting began to escalate as a Mahdi assault on an Iraqi police station in Najaf spurred U.S. Marines to reinforce the area. Fighting continued for the next few days until August 9, when elements of the 1st Cavalry Division, including Sapp's 2nd Battalion, were called in to support Coalition forces. Pfc. Sapp was serving as a machine gunner on an M2 Bradley Fighting Vehicle, one of the U.S. military's workhorse troop transports.

Just before his unit entered the city, Brandon called his father and commented that the combat in Najaf was "really intense." This was an understatement. Heavy fighting was taking place in the city streets and centuries-old tunnels underneath. Hand-to-hand struggles were raging in a pair of large hotels the Mahdi Army had occupied to rain machine gun fire onto the American troops below. Brandon's father John gave him encouragement and told his son "that he was a hero and that [I] loved him."

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Brandon made it through that day, but hard fighting continued for another two weeks. On the night of August 15, Sapp's crew was conducting a nighttime patrol along a canal bridge just outside of Najaf in Taji, Iraq when his vehicle was destroyed by an Improvised Explosive Device, or IED.

Fighting against American troops in Afghanistan and Iraq throughout the 2000s and 2010s, insurgent forces lacking heavy equipment like tanks or Bradley armored vehicles often tried to even the odds with IEDs, which could be set off remotely or rigged to explode when an armored vehicle passed over them—demolishing the vehicle and killing the soldiers inside.

Brandon Sapp was 21 years old when an IED took his life. According to crewmate Tim McClellan, their Bradley was moving across the bridge when Brandon called out that something didn't seem right, and asked the driver to back up. When the IED exploded moments later, Sapp was the only trooper in his vehicle to be killed. "He didn't know it, but he saved our lives," said McClellan.

Sapp received a Bronze Star and Purple Heart for his heroism, as well as a Good Conduct Medal, an Army Service Ribbon, National defense Ribbon, two War on Terrorism Ribbons, a Combat Infantry badge, and a Marksmanship Badge for Grenade and Rifle. One of his comrades-in-arms shared with the family that Brandon was the bravest soldier with whom he had ever served. Brandon's mother feels that her son "died with so much dignity and courage".

SOLDIER KILLED IN NAJAF

The 21-year-old died when his vehicle hit a homemade bomb on Sunday morning.



REMEMBERED: Army Pfc. Brandon R. Sapp, who attended Santaluces High School, was a machine gunner assigned to the 1st Cavalry Division from Fort Hood, Texas. Photo courtesy of the Sapp family

Top right: Brandon Sapp as he appeared in the South Florida Sun-Sentinel newspaper on August 17, 2004.

Bottom right: Brandon's father, stepmother, and four siblings gather around his marker in the West Virginia National Cemetery. Courtesy of John Sapp



Brandon Robert Sapp

Pfc. Brandon Sapp was interred at West Virginia National Cemetery in Pruntytown on August 28, 2004, just a few miles away from the waters of the Tygart Lake he loved so much. A year later, Sapp's mother Hope Veverka helped unveil a new monument in Lake Lytal, Florida, near Palm Beach. A tribute to American soldiers killed in the War on Terror, Brandon's name was one of the first six to be listed on the granite memorial, which was dedicated on July 4, 2005.

A few months later, Brandon's father John Sapp commissioned a custom Harley-Davidson motorcycle to honor his fallen son. "It was all he ever talked about, either buying a Harley or building his own bike," said Brandon's comrade Tim McClellan. At the ceremony revealing the new custom chopper, built by motorcycle legend Billy Lane, John Sapp surprised McClellan by giving him the one-of-a-kind machine. He only asked that Brandon's friend and fellow soldier, "Take the bike and ride with Brandon forever."



Brandon Sapp in uniform. In addition to the memorial in Florida dedicated by his mother, Brandon's obituary on [Legacy.com](#) hosts hundreds of comments from family, friends, comrades, and strangers. *Courtesy of Hope Veverka*

Brandon Robert Sapp

Sources

Most pictures and information obtained directly from personal accounts Sapp's family and friends

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Brandon Robert Sapp

Resting Place

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

Columbaria Section 2
Site 570

Date of interment: August 28, 2004

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.

Please refer comments or questions to the West Virginia Humanities Council
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