

Brandon Robert Sapp

U.S. Army, Private First Class

1983 - 2004

Written by Kaden Delaney and Frederique "Fred" Maloley

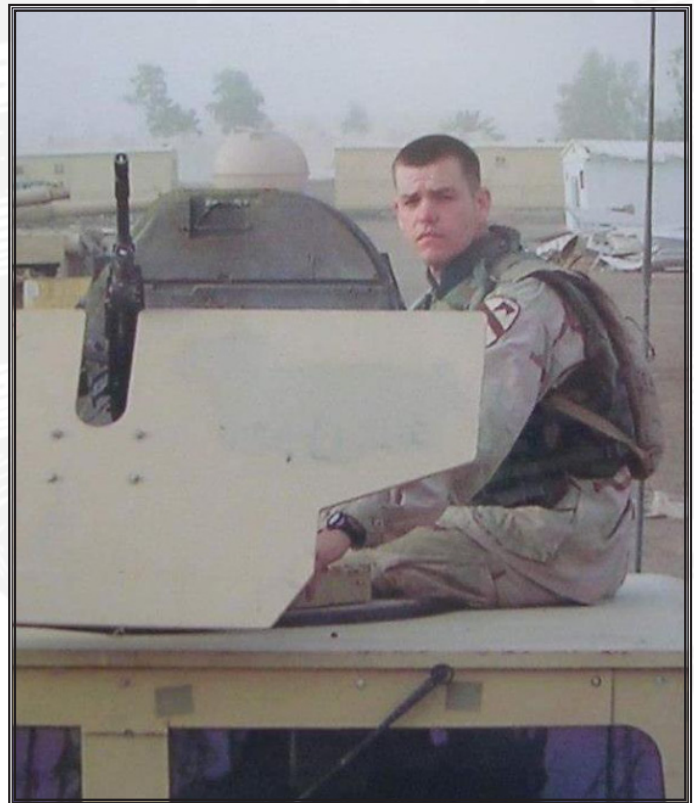
Instructed by Richard Zukowski

Brandon Robert Sapp was born on Father's Day, June 19, 1983, in Lake Worth, Florida, the son of John Sapp and Hope Veverka. His parents divorced when he was young, but both sides of his dual childhood were happy and active. Brandon learned to love motorcycles, electric guitar, and making people laugh. Hope took him snorkeling and skydiving, but also taught him to take responsibility for windows broken during games of street baseball. Many who knew him described Brandon as energetic, happy-go-lucky, and a true friend.

Vacations frequently took the Sapps on summer trips to visit his father's family in Grafton, West Virginia. Brandon hunted and fished along Tygart Lake. As the energetic boy grew up and attended 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.

Searching for the next chapter in his life, Brandon enlisted in the U.S. Army following a long discussion with his mother Hope. It wasn't planned as a lifelong career—he intended to join law enforcement afterward, hopefully as part of an elite SWAT police team. Brandon's father John recalls that his son always "wanted to fight for what was right." The young man's commitment was evident from the start: Hope remembers that Brandon began a strenuous workout regimen as soon as he enlisted.

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



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

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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



they may have fought from horseback on the western plains, since World War II the cavalry have engaged 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.

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 Battalion 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 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 2-7, were called in to support Coalition forces. Pfc. Sapp was serving as a machine gunner on an M2 Bradley Infantry Fighting Vehicle, one of the U.S. military’s workhorse assault vehicles, capable of transporting a small group of infantry and supporting them with a 25mm chain gun, TOW anti-tank missile launcher, and machine gun fire.

Despite being deployed for less than six months, Najaf wasn’t Brandon’s first taste of combat. He confessed in weekly phone conversations with Hope that he was responsible for the deaths of three insurgents, though he couldn’t bring himself to say the word “killed.” The calls sometimes took a serious

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turn. “Have you thought about what you’re going to do with the rest of your life?” he asked Hope before the Najaf battle. It wasn’t rhetorical—the young trooper was constantly confronted by his own mortality in the streets of Iraq, and wanted his mother to consider the question seriously.

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.”

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—



TOP: Brandon Sapp and his mother, Hope. *Courtesy of Hope Veverka.*

CENTER: From *The South Florida Sun-Sentinel*, August 17, 2004.

BOTTOM: Brandon’s father, stepmother, and four stepsiblings gather around his marker in the West Virginia National Cemetery. *Courtesy of John Sapp*

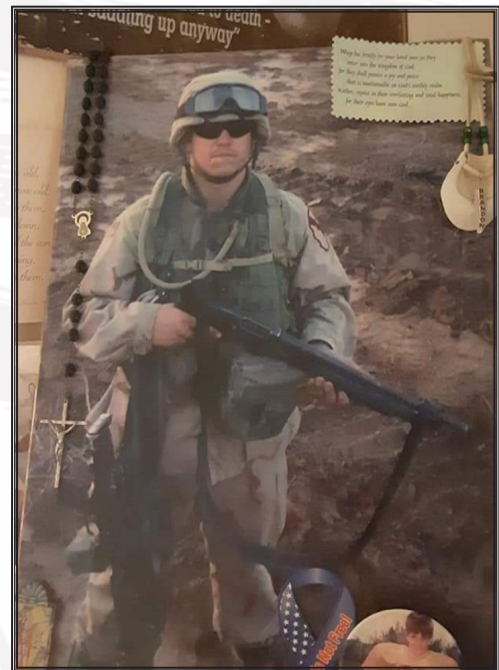
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exposed in an open hatch—was the only trooper to be killed. “He didn’t know it, but he saved our lives,” said McClellan.

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.”

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. In Palm Beach County, Florida, however, where Brandon grew up, his mother Hope realized no monument existed to honor her son or other veterans killed in a war destined to stretch on for decades. Fighting through debilitating grief that sometimes left her sobbing on the floor, Hope tirelessly lobbied the Palm Beach County Commission for a public place to do justice to the memory of her son and other soldiers of his generation.

On July 4, 2005, Hope helped unveil a new monument in Lake Lytal, a park near Palm Beach International Airport. A tribute to Palm Beach County soldiers killed in the War on Terror, Brandon’s name was the first of six to be listed on the granite memorial—though the honor roll has grown in the years since. For Hope, it was a landmark moment in a journey begun months earlier, when she started to confront her pain by meeting with other grieving families at the Vet Center in Lake Worth. She also sent candles and heartfelt letters to families nationwide who had just lost sons, brothers, and fathers to the war. These activities, along with other forms of advocacy for the families of veterans, had emerged as the answer to her son’s heartfelt question, “What are you going to do with the rest of your life?”



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

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Later that year, in a separate memorialization effort, Brandon's father John put out a public call for help in constructing a custom Harley-Davidson motorcycle to honor his fallen son. A ceremony in October 2005 revealed the new custom chopper built by motorcycle legend Billy Lane. "It was all he ever talked about, either buying a Harley or building his own bike," said Brandon's comrade Tim McClellan, whom John Sapp then surprised by giving McClellan the one-of-a-kind machine. The only request was that Brandon's friend and fellow soldier, "Take the bike and ride with Brandon forever."



This biography was updated in March 2024 using additional notes and sources provided by Hope Veverka.



Image courtesy of Hope Veverka.

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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.

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