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## Redefining a "Welcome Reception" The Patriot Guard Riders Rumble into Welcome Minnesota

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Contribution in part from St. Paul Pioneer Press

I drove from La Crosse Wisconsin, on the Mississippi River to Rochester Minnesota at 2:00 AM on Saturday the 3rd of June. My destination was still several hours from Welcome Minnesota, where the Patriot Guard Riders would convene for the funeral and internment of Robert "Robbie" G. Posivio III.

I merged onto I-90 West and the only traffic on the road was a lone bike, screaming through the early morning mist. I knew where they were going. They were part of an organization called the Patriot Guard Riders and they were enduring 48 degrees and a heavy dew point at 2AM to attend the funeral of a brother that they had never met, for a family they would probably never meet, and to represent the best that their country had to offer.

When Robert Posivio (Robbie's father) saw two figures in Marine Corps uniforms walking across the lawn toward his farmhouse the previous Tuesday afternoon, he desperately tried to deceive himself.

Perhaps, he thought, they were delivering the Purple Heart his son, Lance Cpl. Robert Posivio III, had earned when he was wounded April 13 during a mortar attack in Iraq's Anbar Province.

But the two Marines were delivering the news that every military parent dreads.

"We got the Purple Heart the day after we heard he'd been killed in action," Patti Posivio, the 22-year-old Marine's mother, said Friday during a news conference held at Sherburn City Hall.

Called "Robbie" to avoid confusing him with both his grandfathers and father, Posivio had returned to duty less than a month ago after recovering from a severe concussion and shrapnel wounds in both arms. That attack killed two fellow Marines, including one who had been within touching distance of Posivio and



had absorbed the full impact of the mortar blast.

On Tuesday, Posivio was riding in a military vehicle when he was killed by a roadside bomb. The attack, once again, was in Anbar Province near Fallujah.

Based at Camp Pendleton in California, Posivio was on his third tour of duty in Iraq and had long ago lost any sense of adventure for it.

"He was scared — he didn't want to go," Patti Posivio said. "But he loved his country and he wanted to serve it."

Word of his death caused a torrent of mourning in Sherburn, a farming-oriented community of 1,100 about 15 miles west of Fairmont in southern Minnesota.

"Everyone has been in tears around town," said Angel Bettin, who works in the local Cenex gas station.

The death was seen as particularly tragic for the well-known farm family because another son, Daniel, had died in a rollover car crash less than two years ago while home on leave from the Navy. He was 19.

"This is more than one family should have to bear," said Randy Grupe, superintendent of Martin County Public Schools, where Robbie Posivio had attended before graduating in 2002.

An active high school student, Posivio played football and wrestled, sang in the school choir, played in the school band, and was a member of the local Future Farmers of America chapter. He was said to love fishing and motorcycles and he also helped with his church's Sunday school classes.

His graduating class, with just 80 classmates, was part of a school and a town where "everybody knows everybody" Grupe said. "Losing somebody like this is difficult for the family and the community."

Posivio joined the Marines right after graduating and would have finished his four years on July 28 — exactly two years to the day after the death of his younger brother.

"They fought up until they were in the military and then they really enjoyed each other's company," Robert Posivio Jr. said of his two sons. "The military brought them extremely close."

Posivio was also extremely proud about being a Marine.

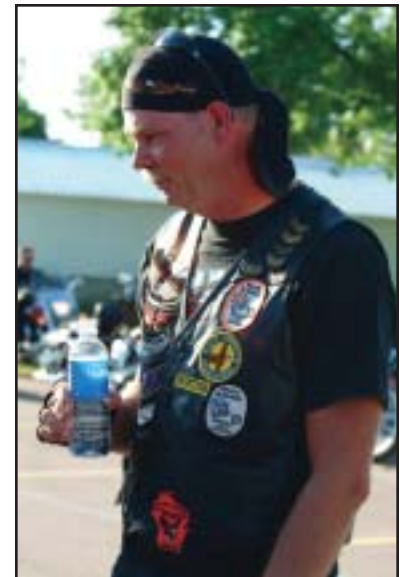
"When he was home on leave or visiting, he was always in military dress," Grupe said. "He was very proud of that."

On Friday, Posivio's parents displayed photographs of their son at the wedding of his older sister, Sarah Peltier, taken last November. The young Marine stood straight in his dress uniform.

Posivio faithfully called his parents twice a week from Iraq and a year ago arranged for his father to fly to Hawaii to meet him for a military-sponsored "tiger cruise" on the USS Duluth to San Diego.

His plans involved taking over the family farm, his parents said. In October, while on leave, he fulfilled a fantasy to buy a new pickup truck.

"Thank God he bought it when he did," Robert Posivio said Friday, adding that the last time they had seen their son was in December before his last deployment.



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