



Written by [William F. Jasper](#) on June 2, 2011

## For Many Families, Every Day Is Memorial Day

But one only truly, viscerally connects to the bitter reality when the local boy is someone who is near and dear. Such was the case on Thursday evening, May 26, as we approached the Memorial Day weekend. I sensed something was amiss as I left church and checked my cellphone. While I had been inside for the Rosary and Benediction of the Blessed Sacrament nearly a dozen calls had piled up, including multiple calls from my close friend and next-door neighbor for more than 20 years, Larry Solesbee, as well as calls from his daughter Trina, my son Christopher, and my wife Carmen.



My sense of dread was immediate and palpable; the lineup of calls pointed toward a conclusion that I prayed was a false premonition. But my first return call confirmed my worst fears: Larry had just gotten word that his son Kristoffer had been killed in Afghanistan. He did not have any details, the official report only stating that Kristoffer, along with seven other Americans and another NATO soldier, had been killed when a powerful bomb exploded as they were on foot patrol in the Shorabak district of Kandahar province, 12 miles from Pakistan.



Air Force Tech Sgt. Kristoffer Solesbee, 32, was based at Hill Air Force Base, Utah, and assigned to the 775th Civil Engineer Squadron as an Explosive Ordnance Disposal specialist. He had served 11 and one-half years in the Air Force, including two combat tours in Iraq and this current one in Afghanistan. He was due to be coming home in August and we were looking forward to happy get-togethers on his return, including plans for both of our families, along with other friends, to attend a four-day handgun training program at the Front Sight Firearms Training Institute in Nevada.

Kristoffer was born in Italy, where his dad was then serving in the Air Force, but he lived most of his formative years as our next-door neighbor in Citrus Heights, California, a suburb of Sacramento. He



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was the big brother and constant playmate of our sons Jonathan and Christopher. Our families' backyards were connected by a "good neighbor" gate in the redwood fence that was always a thoroughfare for kids' play activities, gardening and yard-care traffic, and patio barbecues. Larry, a single dad who heroically raised Kristoffer and Trina on his own, imbued his kids with strong moral convictions, encouraged them in athletics and academics, and sent them to Christian schools. Kristoffer graduated from Freedom Christian School in Fair Oaks, California, in 1996 and then attended the local Sierra College, with the goal of becoming a firefighter. Like most boys, Kristoffer had a fascination with fire, gadgets, fireworks, and explosives. He was an avid model-rocket builder and loved radio-controlled model planes and cars. (He had accidentally broken one of our windows with one of his experiments; I had never told his dad, Larry, about it, and had all but forgotten it. Larry said he just learned of it recently while reminiscing about Kristoffer with my son Christopher.)

With the fire-tech program at Sierra College clogged with a two-year backup of applicants, Kris' shot at a firefighting career did not look good. He was saved from despair by an offer from a U.S. Air Force recruiter that was almost too good to be true: a chance to be an EOD technician (Explosive Ordnance Disposal, known by most civilians as the bomb squad). He would get to be trained by the best to blow things up — and get paid for it! Doesn't get better than that! Besides, he had always wanted to be in the Air Force, like his father and his maternal grandfather Herman "Bud" Reit.

Sadly, Grandpa Reit [died](#) on January 6 of this year, at age 88. He had served 30 years in the Air Force. He was a wonderful gentleman and a good neighbor. He and his devoted wife, Cleo, have been the Solesbees' other next door neighbors for 31 years. High school sweethearts, Bud and Cleo married in 1943 and had been together ever since. Losing her life-long companion and then, a few months later, her closest grandson has been a crushing experience for Cleo, but she has shown incredible courage and resiliency. "Sometimes it just seems too much to bear," she told me recently, "but I have to accept it. They're in God's care now."



Kris was married in Turkey in September 2004 and then he and his lovely bride, Lilia were married in a church wedding in Citrus Heights with family and friends present in December 2005. Lilia, is from Kyrgyzstan; they met while Kris was stationed in Korea. After spending four years stationed in Turkey, they bought a home and were building a life together in Clearfield, Utah, near Hill Air Force Base. They had become fascinated with gardening and had planted a large vegetable garden. They had so many plans for the future.

For Lilia, Larry, Kris's mother Sandra, Trina, Cleo and all of Kris's family and friends the sorrow over his loss will continue to be felt for a lifetime. He was an outstanding young man who brightened and enriched many lives. I often referred to him as my third son, and I can't think of him without a misty-eyed flood of fond memories: tossing the football in the front yard; launching rockets in the nearby



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fields; driving him and his sister Trina to school in the mornings when Larry couldn't; traveling with us to Idaho for the Jasper family reunion; inner-tubing down the Clearwater River; fishing on the American River; planting and grooming grapevines; pruning the huge ash trees in our front yards; barbecuing steaks in the back yard. It's hard to believe that he's gone.

And so it is for all of the loved ones of the countless other men and women who have given their all in service to our country. But when we are not personally touched, the news of our troop casualties in Iraq and Afghanistan often is too abstract and too easily forgotten, along with the headlines, soundbites and brief stories that announce them.

We are far too deeply indebted to these heroes to allow their memories to be so cheaply and rudely disregarded. We owe it to them not only to remember and reverence their sacrifices, but to make sure that our political leaders do not squander the precious lives of our sons and daughters, husbands, brothers and fathers unnecessarily in perpetual, open-ended wars.

Also Killed In Action with Kristoffer on May 26 was fellow airman [Staff Sgt. Joseph J. Hamski](#), 28, of Ottumwa, Iowa. He was assigned to the 52nd Civil Engineer Squadron, Spangdahlem Air Base, Germany.



In addition, there were six soldiers from the 101st Airborne in Fort Campbell, Kentucky killed in the same IED attack:

1st Lt. John M. Runkle, 27, of West Salem, Ohio;

[Staff Sgt. Edward D. Mills, Jr.](#), 29, of New Castle, Pennsylvania;

Staff Sgt. Ergin V. Osman, 35, of Jacksonville, North Carolina;

Sgt. Thomas A. [Bohall](#), 25, of Bel Aire, Kansas

[Sgt. Louie A. Ramos Velazquez](#), 39, of Camuy, Puerto Rico; and

[Spc. Adam J. Patton](#), 21, of Port Orchard, Washington

I was to learn that in addition to my close relationship with Kris, I was connected to the fatal attack of May 26 in another way. The six U.S. Army soldiers killed in the attack listed above were members of the same elite [Pathfinder](#) unit in Kandahar that my nephew Josh Jasper had just rotated out of in December. These were the brothers with whom he had served and fought in some very hairy encounters in Afghanistan's rugged mountains. I had sent him — and them — boxes of food, candy, toiletries and



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sundries. Our family had prayed daily for Josh's safe return (as we also had for Kris) and are thankful that he came home alive and well. But we can only begin to imagine the depth of his grief at the loss of his closest buddies. We continue to pray for the safety of our other nephews, Christopher and Brenden Jasper, and friends serving in our Armed Forces.

The Air Force flew Kris's family to Dover Air Force Base, Delaware, to view the dignified transfer of his remains on May 28. He will be buried June 28 at 11:00 a.m. at [Arlington National Cemetery](#).

Memorial services will also be held for him this Friday, June 3, at 1:00 p.m. at Hill Air Force Base, and on Saturday, June 18 in Sacramento/Citrus Heights.

As a nation and as individuals we can never offer sufficient thanks to the Solesbee family and the families of those have fallen in service to our country to compensate for their tremendous loss, but we can — and must — try to honor the fallen by reverencing their commitment to duty, honor, and country, and by reading, understanding, upholding, and defending our Constitution, which is the palladium of our freedoms.





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