

## Ramsey soldier is remembered

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One morning shortly after her 18-year-old son's 1999 graduation Ellen Hanson found a note on the kitchen.

by Tammy Sakry

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U.S. Army Sgt. Brian Studer, 28, of Ramsey was killed Aug. 22 in Ghazni Province, Afghanistan while attempting to deactivate an improvised explosive device (IED). (Photo submitted)

One morning shortly after her 18-year-old son's 1999 graduation Ellen Hanson found a note on the kitchen.

It was Brian Studer's way of telling her he was joining the U.S. Army.

"I was not happy he enlisted," said Hanson.

Although Studer waited to tell her until two weeks prior to leaving for basic training, the signs were there.

"I thought it was weird he was running in the morning, trying to get into shape," said Hanson, reflecting on Studer who was killed Aug. 22 in Afghanistan deactivating an improvised explosive device (IED).

It was strange because he rarely came out of this room and was not into athletics, said the Ramsey mom.

In his letter, Studer announced he was not returning to Anoka-Ramsey Community College (ARCC) to finish the studies he started as an Elk River High School Post-Secondary Enrollment Options (PSEO) student.

Hanson said she believed he would return to ARCC and finish his credits and then transfer to a university, like University of North Dakota, to complete an engineering degree.

Studer thanked her for raising him and giving him what he needed for the last 18 years.

"And don't yell at me," said Hanson.

Hanson's first plan was to stay home from work with the intentions of talking it out with him.

"It wasn't what I wanted him to do, but he was an adult," she said.

Her quiet son was always a thinker and had a quest to learn things. He thought things over to determine what he wanted and "all you can do is back him at that point," said Hanson on her son's decision.

"This was how he was going to get the training and education he wanted," she said.

The boy

Studer was a quiet boy who loved reading, classical music and watching the Discovery and History channels.

He was fascinated by the military, said Hanson.

One of his teachers once gave him a hard time, asking for something other than reports on military vehicles, she said.

His reports for school were always about Army cargo planes and other military equipment, said Hanson of her second of four children.

During Studer's Sept. 3 funeral, his 720th Explosive Ordnance Disposal Company, 28th Transportation Battalion commander, Sgt. 1st Class Jay Wilson referred to Studer as "a sponge for knowledge."

He always was, said Hanson.

"He never had to study. He would just read about a subject or watch a television program on it and he just knew about it," she said.

"You could talk to him on any subject."

Studer's quest for knowledge drove him to seek more information on his favorite subjects, like robotics.

He was corresponding with various professionals, including the NASA historian, said Hanson.

Of course, in his earlier years Studer did not always like certain aspects of learning.

One of his teachers thought Studer was having problems with his spelling, according to Hanson.

But Studer was misspelling words on purpose.

He figured out that if he did well on his spelling tests, the teacher would assign him the usual 10 words plus five extra words. He didn't want the extra work and outsmarted the teacher to get out of it, said Hanson.

Studer was also a peacemaker.

Whenever people were in a heated discussion or in an argument, Studer would come in with a joke or something to break the tension, said Hanson.

While Studer rarely got upset and was a man of few words, his face displayed his inner feelings.

He had a very expressive face and he could never play poker, said Hanson.

The soldier

Studer's love of challenges and learning eventually lead him to the 720th Explosive Ordnance Disposal (EOD) Company.

He was big into robotics and the unit uses a lot of robotic equipment, said Hanson.

When he finished basic training, Studer was attached to an engineering unit.

"He didn't want to be in a combat area. That wasn't his personality to do that type of stuff," said Hanson.

But Studer found the working boring.

He didn't like the repetitive process of building things and then tearing them down, said Hanson.

"He wanted something to do," she said.

There is less hurry-up-and-wait with the EOD than other units, Hanson said.

With the EOD, Studer would be learning all the time, she said.

It took Studer three years to secure a spot in the unit.

What he did with the unit and the action Studer saw is pretty much a mystery for Hanson.

“He never talked about anything he saw (or did),” she said.

Mostly Studer told the family that his unit might have to go out every other week do something, telling Hanson “all we do is sit around here. It’s boring. We do nothing, play Wii.”

“Mostly he didn’t want us to worry,” said Hanson.

While getting ready for the funeral, arranged by Studer’s brother Philip, Hanson found out Studer went on more than 100 missions.

Philip asked him once if had he ever had to shoot his gun or shot someone. Although Studer said he had shot his gun. As to if he shot someone, “I don’t know, it was dark and we were running.”

Although Hanson did not know a lot about Studer’s military missions, she did know about one of his hobbies – ordering military equipment.

While in Iraq three years ago, Studer started ordering equipment and having it sent to her Ramsey home.

After a while Hanson told him to stop the frequent ordering and get a new hobby.

She was afraid the Department of Homeland Security would show up her door and haul her in as a terrorist suspect, said Hanson.

Studer kept ordering and Hanson kept mailing the packages onto his base in Afghanistan.

Studer was taking the equipment apart to figure out what was wrong with the equipment and making improvements to them.

His military missions are not the only thing Studer kept from his family.

Wilson told them how Studer had rescued a goat from another Army unit.

The group had been feeding the goat hot dogs and Studer, being an information nut, went online to research the needs of the goat, said Hanson.

When he found out the goat would die on a diet of hot dogs, Studer snuck into the unit and stole the goat.

Studer set the goat up in a nearby orchard and went out during bad weather to make sure it was under the lean-to, Hanson said.

If the weather was really bad it would end up in the commanding officer's office, she said.

When the unit members tried to reclaim the goat, Studer apparently gave them a look (which years earlier earned him the nickname Ogre) and said "the goat stays," said Hanson repeating the tale Wilson had shared with her.

#### Lasting memories

In August, Studer joined all of his family members in Hawaii for a vacation.

It was the first vacation the family has had together since their 1992 trip to Disney World, said Hanson.

They did everything from a luau, magic shows and lots of time on the beach.

"He didn't feel good for a couple of days and I gave him a hard time, telling him he wasn't used to the civilian food," said Hanson.

The family also talked about what Studer would do when his hitch was up in February or March.

He told Philip he was thinking about joining Halo Trust, which travels around the world removing war debris.

"I was happy he was getting out," said Hanson.

Hanson had expected that Studer would move back home until he figured out where he wanted to settle down.

Studer was also looking forward to doing more traveling.

He liked it when he was stationed in Germany because of all the traveling he could do while there, said Hanson.

Studer had taken trips to Egypt, China, Australia, New Zealand, Vietnam and Thailand.

Hanson said Studer likely had plans to travel to Scotland next.

“He liked to go places,” she said.

Studer remained in Hawaii for an additional week and a half with his brother, who lives in Hawaii, after his mother and two sisters returned to Minnesota.

Approximately 10 days after returning to his unit in Ghazni Province, Afghanistan, the 28-year-old was killed by an IED.

The call

When the military came to her door, Hanson was at her job as a chemist for Nestle Nutrition.

Her youngest daughter, Chellee, called and said there was two Army officers at the door, but they would not tell her why they were there.

Later that day, Hanson was told Studer had been killed trying to deactivate an IED.

That is unusual for the unit. They normally don't get close to the IEDs. They used robotic equipment and extension poles, said Hanson.

When the normal methods failed, Studer went in to handle it.

A second IED was set off.

They think the first one was a diversion, said Hanson.

“As a team leader, he always put himself in the position of danger,” said Lt. Cmdr. Kyle Nordmeyer, battalion commander.

He could always count on Studer to take care of the soldiers. His values and code of honor made him a beacon to others, Nordmeyer said at the funeral.

Hanson said she is appreciative of the state flying the flags at half-staff for her son and was surprised Gov. Tim Pawlenty attended the funeral even though it was during the Republican National Convention (RNC).

The EOD members, in town for the RNC, also came to the funeral.

When they drove into the Fort Snelling National Cemetery, a local bomb squad unit also met the procession with all the emergency lights on and the equipment out to honor Studer, said Hanson.

“It was a really touching moment that they would take the time out and get permission to move the van (to the cemetery),” she said.

The number of people attending his funeral and all the cards filling her mail box are a testament to Studer.

“Everyone liked him. He was smart. He could joke around with you. He was always quiet and thought things out. Brian didn’t have dreams – he had plans he was working on,” said Hanson.

“It’s too bad. Imagine what he could have done. He could have done something real good, but it is what it is.”

Studer is survived by his mother, Ellen Hanson of Ramsey; father, Gene Studer of Rose Creek; brother Philip Studer, Hawaii; sisters, Crystal Studer and Chellee Hanson, both of Ramsey; and his maternal grandparents, Bernice and Bill Carpenter of Austin.

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