



Lance Cpl. Andrew Francis Whitacre of Bryant, Indiana was a 2005 graduate of Jay County High School. He was indecisive about certain issues, but when it came to the marines, his commitment never wavered. Andrew wanted to be a Marine since the age of 14. The decision to join the brotherhood he'd admired since he was 14 years old was a long time in the making. That was out of character for a man more known for his spontaneity. When he first broached the idea with his parents, they thought he'd soon move on to something else. To their surprise, the dream stuck with him, and Andrew signed up for the Marines before he graduated from high school. In hindsight, the move made sense. Andrew always fought for the little guy. In junior high and high school, he would be the first to stand up to bullies, even when that meant getting in trouble himself. He took advantage of an early enlistment program, deciding to become a marine in 2005, when at age 17. Andrew left for boot camp July 5, 2005. He was a member of Bryant Wesleyan Church. Andrew was engaged to be married and the couple had planned a midnight wedding at a future date. He died while conducting combat operations in Farah Province, Afghanistan at age 21.

Contributed by Elizabeth Reed

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Lance Cpl. Andrew F. Whitacre: Home of the brave

A Jay County hero has earned another medal for bravery in the last moments of his life.

The late Marine, Lance Cpl. Andrew F. Whitacre, has been awarded the fourth-highest combat medal for military personnel. His friends, family and local leaders gathered Friday in a ceremony to accept the Bronze Star Medal posthumously.

"We are gathered here today to honor a true hero," Staff Sgt. Ralph Polley told the crowd at the Jay Community Center at the start of the ceremony. Polley, and other Marines present on Friday, also attended Whitacre's funeral in June 2008.

Whitacre, 21, was awarded the medal for his bravery and efforts to protect other Marines, while putting himself in harm's way. The Bryant resident was killed June 19 during combat operations in Farah Province, Afghanistan. His family was given the Purple Heart Medal at his funeral service.

"I'm just so proud of him," Whitacre's mother, Susan Nunly, said after the emotional ceremony. "I knew the kid was special. I just knew he was going to make something good of his life."

Whitacre's father, Ernie Whitacre, echoed the sentiment. "I'm very honored. I wish he didn't have to win it" by dying. "But he definitely deserved it."

The ceremony originally was set to be held at Freedom Park, Portland. It was moved to the community center because it was chilly and overcast on Friday afternoon. Back in June, rain fell just as Whitacre's body arrived at the funeral home.

Along with Ernie Whitacre and Nunly, Andrew Whitacre's stepmother, Norma, his grandmother and brother and sister attended the ceremony on Friday. Several family members brushed away tears during the event.

The citation states that Whitacre was posthumously awarded the medal for "heroic achievement in connection with combat operations against the enemy." He served as a Rifleman in the 2nd Platoon, Company G, 2nd Battalion in the Marines. He was killed while fighting as part of Operation Enduring Freedom.

According to the citation, Whitacre and his squad were pursuing enemy fighters when they were ambushed. Whitacre rushed over 30 meters of open ground and began firing on the enemy, allowing his comrades to seek cover.

When a member of his squad was killed, he left the small berm he was behind and continued to fire so his fellow Marines could reach his fallen comrade. He remained exposed to the enemy and continued to fire until he lost his life.

Whitacre joined the Marines in June of 2005, Polley said during the ceremony. He served in Iraq in 2006 and was sent to Afghanistan in 2008.

In March, the Hoosier Heartland Chapter of the American Red Cross posthumously named Whitacre a Hero of the Heartland. The Jay School Corporation has honored Whitacre with a Character in Motion award.



Ernie Whitacre, father of Marine Lance Cpl. Andrew Whitacre, accepts a Bronze Star from Gunnery Sgt. Jason Vick during a ceremony Friday afternoon at the Jay Community Center. Pictured to Ernie Whitacre's right is Susan Nunley, Andrew Whitacre's mother. At right is Ernie Whitacre's wife Norma Whitacre.

(The Commercial Review/Mike Snyder)