

BELLEVUE VETS CLUB IN MEMORIAM



PFC Russell Madden

BELLEVUE, KY

When Russell Madden signed up for the Army two years ago, it was with one purpose -- to provide medical care for his son.

Four-year-old Parker has cystic fibrosis.

"Where he had been working he had no benefits or anything like that," said Madden's sister, Lindsey Madden, "so he joined because he knew that Parker would always be taken care of no matter what." Russell Madden's family learned Wednesday night that the 29-year-old Bellevue High School graduate had been killed in Afghanistan. Madden, a Private First Class, died that morning when his convoy was attacked with a rocket-propelled grenade, his sister said.

Madden's parents, Martin and Pamela Madden; his wife, Michelle; and his son and stepson were all traveling to Dover Air Force Base in Delaware, where Madden's remains are being returned from Afghanistan.

An American flag and an Army Airborne Division flag hung Thursday from the Northern Kentucky home where Madden grew up.

"The one thing he was always known for was a good laugh," recalled his 23-year-old sister. "He was the funniest, most outrageous person. He was the craziest person I've ever met in my life."



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When he was overseas, the family communicated regularly through Facebook and the occasional phone call, she said. When Army officials arrived on Wednesday night, Lindsey was on the computer retrieving the last e-mail her brother sent to their parents.

"He had just sent them a message saying how much he appreciated us," she said, "and that he thinks about us every day."

News of Madden's death traveled quickly through the small city and especially among the remaining members of the 56-person Bellevue High class of 2000.

"I think everybody is just kind of in shock. It's very sad," assistant principal David Eckstein said. "We are very upset for his family and two children."

Madden was a talented athlete who ran track and played football, lettering all four years at Bellevue High.

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"He always laid it on the line for Bellevue, just like he did for his country," said Charlie Coleman, Madden's football coach.

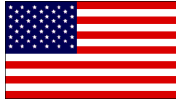
Matt Pickeral was Madden's teammate, classmate and best friend. Last year, before Madden left for Afghanistan, the two spent a night sitting on the 50-yard line of the Bellevue football stadium.

"We probably sat there until about 4 in the morning, talking, crying," Pickeral said. "I told him whenever you come back we're going to get together right here."

But Madden said: "What if I don't?" Pickeral recalled.

Pickeral told his friend not to think about that -- but if it happened, Pickeral said, "I'll do whatever I can to help your family."

Pickeral said he admires what Madden did for his family. "Knowing that he was willing to literally put his life on the line so that his son could have a better life," he said. "I don't know what more you could do."



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Madden, a member of the 1st Squadron, 91st Cavalry Regiment, 173rd Airborne Brigade Combat Team, was deployed to Afghanistan in November.

After his deployment, his wife of six years, who also grew up in Bellevue, moved the family to Fort Thomas. Funeral arrangements are not yet complete.

Michael Foulks, who was principal at Bellevue High while Madden was a student, said he knew Madden well. "The kids in Bellevue are not big physically, but they could all reach down inside their hearts and do what they needed to get to the next level," Foulks said. "Russell stood for what Bellevue is -- hard-working, determined and willing to do whatever it takes to succeed."

"Russell was a great guy, it is unfortunate," Nick Wilson, the athletic director at Bellevue High School and a former classmate of Madden's said. "I feel very sorry for his family and especially his young sons not being able to have a father for the rest of their lives, which is pretty sad, but I'm sure they're proud of Russell as we are. Especially here at school it takes a lot to do that, to serve your country and ultimately the ultimate sacrifice."

The assistant principal at Bellevue High School, David Eckstein, says the news is hard on the tiny Northern Kentucky community.

"It is a very tight knit community and I'm sure the community is going to be very supportive of the Madden family," Eckstein said.

The flag at Bellevue High School is now flying at half-staff in honor of Madden.