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Rockfield road named in honor of soldier killed in combat

By DON SERGENT dsergent@bgdailynews.com 2 hrs ago

Robert L. Henderson II is captured above in uniform during his early military days. Henderson

submitted



Robert Henderson's widow Lisa Henderson (from right), his sister Jackie Hawkins, and his son P.J. Henderson unveil a sign Monday for the First Lt. Robert Henderson II Memorial Highway at VFW Post 1298. **For video, go to bgdailynews.com.**

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Sgt. Justin Brown of the Kentucky National Guard's 2123rd Transportation Company remembers Warren County native and fellow soldier Robert Henderson II as a hero. Now, others traveling through the Rockfield community Henderson once called home will remember him as well.

Henderson, who was killed in action 15 years ago in Iraq at age 33, was honored Monday during a ceremony at Veterans of Foreign Wars Post 1298 with the reading of a state Senate joint resolution proclaiming a 2.5-mile stretch of Ky. 1083 as "First Lt. Robert Henderson II Memorial Highway."

After a sign bearing that new name was unveiled, Brown said it was fitting that a road in Henderson's home community should be named for the platoon leader who was posthumously awarded a Bronze Star and a Purple Heart.

"It didn't take me long to realize what kind of leader Robert was," said Brown, who served with Henderson in Iraq and has been in the National Guard for 18 years. "He led his soldiers with integrity and put them ahead of himself and his needs."

That was never more apparent than on April 17, 2004, when Henderson was leading part of a convoy near Diwaniyah in southern Iraq. His Humvee was ambushed, and Henderson was shot twice, but that didn't stop him from taking action that is credited with saving the lives of many of his fellow soldiers.

"He knew he was severely wounded, but he turned around and went back to where he was shot," Brown said. "He got back in the fight to make sure he could lay down some fire and keep his platoon from sustaining more casualties.

“It’s pretty amazing to think that someone, knowing he’s gravely wounded, would turn around and get back in the fight. I have no doubt that he prevented more casualties that day.”

Henderson’s actions while mortally wounded have earned him many honors, including the naming three years ago of the AMVETS Post 130 that is housed at VFW Post 1298 as the Robert Henderson Post.

But Henderson’s widow, Lisa Henderson, said no honor is more fitting than renaming the stretch of Ky. 1083 from U.S. 68 to Tommy Smith Road in his memory.

“He traveled that road a lot,” Lisa Henderson said. “Bowling Green was special to him and to me. It means a lot for his memory to be kept alive in this community.”

Henderson’s name will be kept alive largely because of the efforts of state Sen. David Givens, R-Greensburg, who worked with the Kentucky Transportation Cabinet to find the right stretch of road and then guided the joint resolution through the Senate.

“This serves as a reminder to all of us what the cost of freedom is,” Givens said. “We’re honoring someone who made the ultimate sacrifice, and we’re also paying it forward for young men and women who can get educational benefit from this.”

Henderson, a Warren Central High School and Western Kentucky University graduate who worked as a sales manager at Lowe’s, was remembered fondly by others.

Diana Hankla, who taught Henderson for two years at Rockfield, said: “Even as a child, he was a leader. He was one of the kindest students I ever had, and I remember that he would make sure other students had what they needed. He was just a sweetheart.”

Warren County Judge-Executive Mike Buchanon is acquainted with Henderson’s family and knew him when he was a youngster.

“He always had an air of confidence,” Buchanon recalled. “He was a fine young man and an accomplished leader. He loved serving in the National Guard.”

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MORE INFORMATION

VIDEO: Portion of Ky. 1083 renamed '1st Lt. Robert Henderson II Memorial Highway' in late soldier's memory

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