

**New York Daily News - <http://www.nydailynews.com>****Lost in Iraq: Seven New York heroes**

By PATRICE O'SHAUGHNESSY

DAILY NEWS WRITER

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A year ago, they started shipping out to the Middle East from military bases in Texas, California and Kansas, places far from the gritty New York neighborhoods they called home. They went to war because they wanted to help people, to avenge terrorism or simply because it was their job as soldiers.

They were soldiers because they had chosen to take a hard, honest way out of places that didn't offer them much. They wanted an education, a career, financial support for their families.

**Pfc. Luis Moreno**

Nineteen-year-old Pfc. Luis Moreno was buried on Feb. 6 in a cold, pelting rain after he was eulogized in a humble church in the Bronx on a street that abruptly ends above the rumble of the Cross Bronx Expressway. His funeral was attended by livery drivers and bodega clerks and city workers, a handful of cops and an Army honor guard.

He succumbed to a gunshot wound Jan. 29, the seventh and youngest soldier from the city to die in Iraq.

Like the six before him, he mirrored the Caribbean and African-American young of New York, while the majority of the 529 service members who have died since the war began were white.

Five of the New Yorkers grew up only a couple of miles apart, in Queens and Brooklyn. The other two were separated by the strip of Harlem River between their upper Manhattan and west Bronx neighborhoods.

The first three to die were Marines, in the televised, glory-filled drive toward Baghdad.

Then, after "major combat" was declared over on May 1, the next three men and sole woman from the city to die were G.I.s. One was killed by an improvised explosive on the road; one was accidentally shot by a fellow soldier cleaning his gun, and the third died after falling into a bomb crater.

Moreno took a bullet while guarding a gas station. His death came as officials widely acknowledged there may be no weapons of mass destruction in Iraq.

**Marine Cpl. Robert Rodriguez**

The city's first fatality came six days after the war began. Marine Cpl. Robert Rodriguez was killed on March 25, when the tank he was in came under fire and plunged off a bridge into the Euphrates River northwest of Nassiriya.

The 5-foot-2, tattooed bodybuilder would have turned 22 today. Born in Brooklyn of Puerto Rican heritage, he had lived since age 12 with his parents, four older siblings and their children in a yellow, two-family house on 59th Drive in Maspeth.

His father is a union electrician. His siblings include a retired cop and a career Navy woman.

Rodriguez loved basketball, handball and buying clothes at the Queens Center Mall. He also loved being the "big uncle" to his 17 nieces and nephews.

He joined the Marines after he got his equivalency diploma through the National Guard challenge program, because he wanted to follow his family into service, and earn his keep.

Rodriguez was with the 1st Marine Division, stationed in Twentynine Palms, Calif. Mayor Bloomberg, other city officials and a full complement of Marines, firefighters and police attended his funeral.

"He wanted to go over there because of 9/11," said his sister, Hyda Hernandez-Lopez. "I feel the war is a waste at this point ... they're still dying over there."

**Marine Lance Cpl. William White**

She said she keeps in touch with Martha Holder, the mother of Marine Lance Cpl. William White, the second city soldier to die in Iraq. White, who also was in the 1st Marine Division, was based at Camp Pendleton, Calif.

He would have been 25 years old on Feb. 6, the day Moreno was buried.

White grew up in Bushwick and Bedford-Stuyvesant, about 10 minutes from Rodriguez's home. Reared by a mother who was a correction officer and a father who was a veteran of the Persian Gulf War, White escaped the drugs and gunfire that had taken the lives of so many young men in his neighborhood.

He died March 28 when his Humvee overturned into a canal in what the Defense Department called a nonhostile accident. He was a disciplined student of martial arts, and of the Bible, as well. He had wanted to move back to Brooklyn and become a cop or firefighter. Eighteen months before he died, he married Mychaele White.

Rita Russell, his aunt, said her sister, Holder, just went back to work at Rikers Island.

"She has not been doing well," Russell said.

"I feel very bad for all the families. The poor mother [speaking of Moreno's mother]. "I picture her like my sister is."

Moreno's wake was held at a funeral home on Broadway and W. 190th St., three blocks from the home of Marine Staff Sgt. Riayan Tejada, who was killed April 11 when his unit was ambushed in northeast Baghdad.

**Marine Staff Sgt. Riayan Tejada**

Tejada was 26 years old and the father of two girls. He joined the Marines nine years ago. He loved Latin music and baseball, and lived in an apartment on W. 188th St. off St. Nicholas Ave. in Washington Heights.

He was in the 3rd Battalion, based at Camp Pendleton, and became a marksman in his unit.

A Dominican immigrant, Tejada was posthumously awarded U.S. citizenship - a distinction that still awaits Army Spec. Rasheed Sahib, killed on May 18..

**Army Spec. Rasheed Sahib**

Sahib lived a few miles from Rodriguez and White. His family came to the United States from Guyana when he was 7, and he was reared in an immaculate home in a rowhouse on Woodbine St., Bushwick. His mother is a home care attendant; his father died when he was 2. He went to Franklin K. Lane High School and worked long hours in Dunkin' Donuts.

Tall and thin, he loved barbecues, Coney Island and the Yankees. He was reared a Muslim.

Sahib wanted a college education but didn't want his mother saddled with a loan.

"He told me, 'You did enough, I'll take care of you.'" said his mother, Fizoon Ashraf. "He loved the Army; he said he was happy to help the people."

He was assigned to the 20th Field Artillery of the Army's 4th Infantry Division, based at Fort Hood, Tex. He died in Balad, Iraq, when another soldier's gun discharged while he was cleaning it.

"No one [official] came to his funeral," said his mother.

She aches because she still doesn't know all the circumstances of the shooting. One of the Army officers who delivered the news told her the incident is still under investigation. She said elected officials who promised to help don't return her phone calls now.

**Pfc. Rayshawn Johnson**

Another child of Brooklyn, from Crown Heights, also was stationed at Fort Hood with the 4th Infantry Division.

Rayshawn Johnson of Maple St. was killed when his vehicle hit a land mine in Tikrit on Nov. 3. He was with the 299th Engineer Battalion.

Johnson was born in East New York and given up for adoption when he was 7. He went to Wingate High School, dropped out, got his equivalency diploma and took courses at Touro College. He joined the Army after his family gave him an ultimatum.

Rosalyn Wynter, his aunt, said they worried because Johnson could not find work and spent too much time on the street. Sent to Iraq last June, he wanted to be a federal law enforcement agent. When he came home for visits, he would not take off his Army greens.

### **Sgt. Linda Jimenez**

Yet another Brooklynite who pursued a career in the Army was Sgt. Linda Jimenez. Born in East Flatbush, daughter of a union carpenter, she grew up in Richmond Hill, Queens, and enlisted in 1991 after losing a secretarial job.

Jimenez, 39, was assigned to the 2nd Armored Cavalry Regiment in Fort Polk, La., and was sent to Iraq in April. She stumbled into a bomb crater on Oct. 31, breaking her knee and nose. But a blood clot developed, and she died Nov. 15 at Walter Reed Army Medical Center, her father, Angelo Cruz, at her bedside.

Cruz, of Arizona, said his daughter was patriotic but became fearful and angry in Baghdad. She had been scheduled to return to the States on Sept. 15 but was held over. Jimenez is also survived by a 3-year-old son.

Moreno lived in another Dominican stronghold in the city, Morris Heights, a tough slice of the Bronx that has struggled with entrenched drugs and violence. His father, Manuel, works in a bodega. Moreno attended Taft High School and went into the Army to "get out of this neighborhood," his girlfriend said.

Moreno died in a hospital in England, a week after he was shot in the head standing watch at a Baghdad gas station. His mother, Francisca de la Cruz, begged President Bush to "bring our soldiers home." The family has asked that he be granted citizenship. Rep. Jose Serrano (D-Bronx) was the only official at his funeral.

Outside Moreno's Grand Ave. building, a large photo of him and a wreath of red-white-and-blue carnations graced the locked steel gate. At the other end of the city, at the home of the first New York soldier to die in Iraq, American flags dot the street outside, which has been renamed Robert Marcus Rodriguez Way.