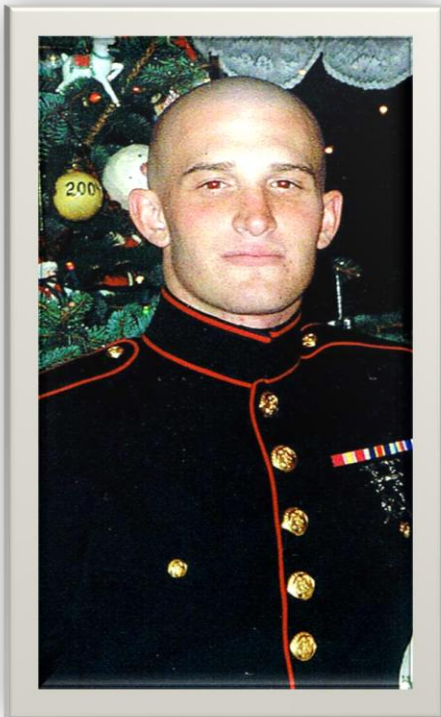


## The Record: Thank you, sergeant

Saturday, January 23, 2010

The Record

GIVEN THAT we live in the heart of one of the biggest media markets in the world, it is easy for us to become distracted, to lose focus on things that matter. Too often, we are consumed by the trivial or the profane, the newest scandal or latest talking point, the most outrageous sound bite from a politician, celebrity or athlete. Too often, we wage long arguments about whether taxes are too high or how much our cable rates might go up.



**Marine Sgt. Christopher Hrbek**

Too often, we are caught in life's hurried paces, rushing to make it to the next exit on the parkway, forgetting to hug our children.

Sometimes, though, we are forced to remember. Sometimes, we are reminded that lives are more than sound bites. We are reminded that duty calls and sacrifices are made. We are reminded that soldiers die in battle.

Today the tight-knit community of Westwood will say its final goodbyes to one of its noblest sons, Marine Sgt. Christopher Hrbek, 25, who was killed in action Jan. 14 in Helmand province, Afghanistan.

Most of us never met Hrbek, but in recent days, from listening to the words of those who knew and loved him, or perhaps only remember him from his outgoing smile and boundless energy, we feel we have come to know something of his spirit and his character.

We know that he was a 2002 graduate of Westwood High School and a member of the school's wrestling team. We know that he was a nine-year member of the Westwood Fire Department. We know that he came from a family long committed to military service and to service in general. And we know that Hrbek was a proud and decorated Marine who served three combat tours in Iraq and who was recently honored for heroism during combat in Afghanistan.

We know, too, that a million real tears are still to be shed in Westwood and beyond for this one who died in a faraway land while serving his country, seemingly doing that which he was born to do.

Since the attacks of Sept. 11, 2001, as hundreds of thousands of other young Americans stepped forward to wear the nation's uniform and to deploy overseas to serve in wartime, scores of other communities have borne the grief that Westwood feels right now. Many of these are small towns, places where flags are hung and where patriotism is more than a word, places where the loss is felt the greatest.

Of course, words ultimately come up short in moments like these, even those words like glory, sacrifice and honor. And yet when a young soldier falls in combat, we pause in our steps, and vainly attempt to grasp their meaning.

Today, many more words will be spoken about Christopher Hrbek, words that will attempt to comfort, words that will remind us that the world is still a dangerous place, and that battles continue to be fought in the name of freedom. In the end, though, maybe just two words will suffice, for this young Marine and for all the others who have answered the call of duty: Thank you.

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