

LAURELTON Times

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Springfield Gdns soldier killed

18-year-old Le Ron Wilson fulfilled his dream of an Army career, only to be cut down by roadside bomb

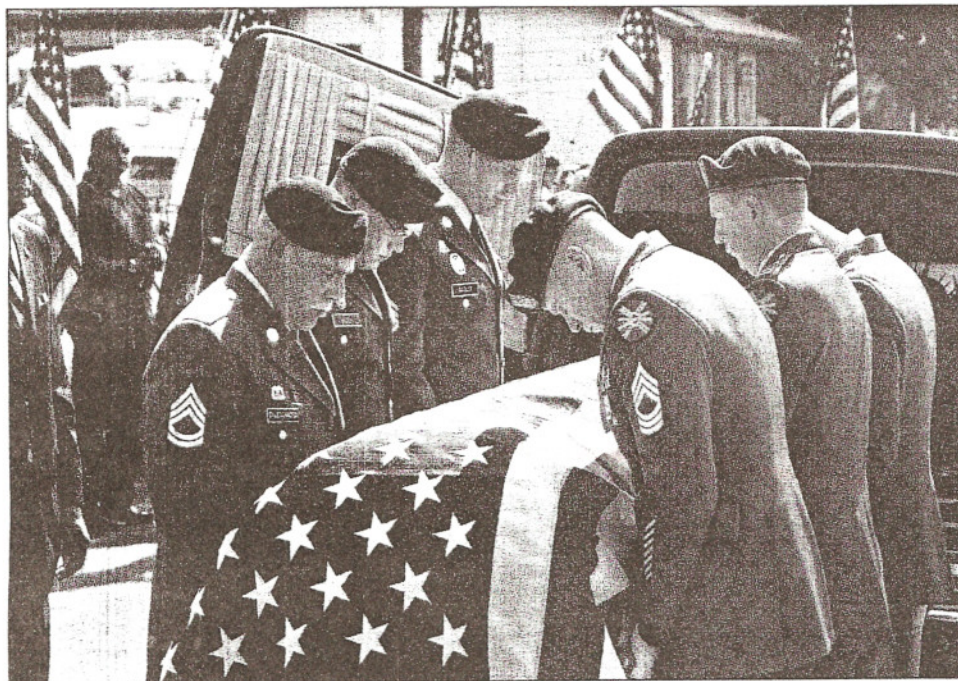


Photo by John Wendle

Army soldiers carry the flag-draped casket of Springfield Gardens resident Le Ron Wilson, who graduated from Thomas Edison High School last year.

BY IVAN PEREIRA

Whether it was playing with his Army action figures with friends or browsing Web sites devoted to military weapons, nothing satisfied Le Ron Wilson more than the thought of fighting for his country.

The 18-year-old Springfield Gardens resident finally fulfilled his dream last year when he joined the Army immediately after graduating from Thomas Edison High School in Jamaica. That dream did not last long. Wilson was killed in Baghdad on July 6 when a roadside bomb exploded near his vehicle.

At Wilson's funeral at Christ the King Church in Springfield Gardens Tuesday a packed congregation mourned the young soldier one last time before he was buried at Long Island National Cemetery.

Family and friends remembered Wilson earlier this week as a patriotic and friendly young man. Born in Trinidad, he moved to Queens when he was 11 to live with his mother Simona Francis, 42. Although the change was awkward for the boy, he soon came to love his new home.

"When he was young, he used to be a very shy person, but when he went to high school he got more enthusiastic," Francis said.

According to friends, Wilson excelled academically in computers and in varsity football as well as socially at Thomas Edison.

"He was one of the few people that I knew that always had a smile on his face," said Daniel Rafael, 23, a friend from Jamaica.

As great as his other passions were nothing was greater to Wilson when he was a boy than being a soldier.

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Springfield Gardens soldier

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Enthralled by the cool nature of military weapons, he spent days on end studying and fantasizing about working with them.

His chance to join the military came when he met with an Army recruiter visiting his high school two years ago who told Wilson about opportunities to be a weapons specialist and repairman. The teen instantly jumped on the idea despite the reluctance of his mother, who did not want her elder son to get hurt.

"I tried to talk him out of it 10 times, but he knew what he wanted and researched everything," said Francis, sitting in her home surrounded by photos of her son as a toddler right on up to manhood.

In the end, she let her

son follow his dream and on Wilson's 17th birthday she signed his enlistment papers for the Army.

On the afternoon of his high school graduation, Wilson shipped out to his training base at Fort Stewart, Ga. His energetic attitude continued during his training where he quickly earned two promotions and was twice named "Soldier of the Month."

"He fulfilled his dream even though I wish he didn't have to do it that way," she said.

Other family members, however were frustrated by the Bush administration's handling of the Iraq war, which has resulted more than 3,600 American death.

"He sacrificed his life for no reason. He was a patriot, but he was too

young to die," said his uncle, John Francis, as he held back tears.

City Councilman James Sanders (D-Laurelton), expressed the same sentiments. "When you look at the pictures of a young man that was taken away before his life began, there are no words that you can use to describe the pain," he said.

Speaking in front of Wilson's flag-draped coffin at the funeral, Gen. Bill Phillips gave his family several military awards including the purple heart and Bronze star.

"I did not know Private Le Ron Wilson personally, but I do know what kind of soldier he was through the words of his comrades and family. He is an American hero in my eyes," Phillips said.

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