

## PUTNAM COUNTY LAID THREE HEROES TO REST THIS YEAR

Lindsay McReynolds  
Herald-Citizen Staff

**PUTNAM COUNTY** -- Of the many families across the United States who suffered the loss of loved ones in the military this year, three of those had ties to Putnam County.

The first was a 1979 graduate of Upperman High School, **Ronald Johnson**, who had retired from the military and was working for a private security company with a contract in Iraq when his helicopter crashed in Baghdad in January.

Johnson had a long distinguished career in the military's Special Forces, including service in the 1983 invasion of Grenada. After retiring from the military, he began working for a private security company as a helicopter pilot.

His career in the military earned him a variety of awards including the Legion of Merit, the Purple Heart, a Meritorious Service Medal, Air Medal, Joint Services Commendation Medal, Army Commendation Medal, Good Conduct Medal and Nation Defense Service Medal.

The second of those killed while serving their country in the military occurred in April with the death of former Monterey resident **Alex van Aalten**.

Alex van Aalten was a 21-year-old sergeant in the 82nd Airborne Division of the U.S. Army who was killed after he stepped on a mine in the Kandahar Region of Afghanistan, where he was stationed as a truck commander.

Van Aalten had been in Afghanistan since January and was scheduled to be there for 15 months.

He also served his country in Iraq in 2005, when he was a gunner on a humvee whose main objective was to run insurgents out of town so the citizens could vote.

Van Aalten signed up for the Army after graduating from high school and went to basic training at Ft. Benning in Georgia.

He was immediately assigned to the 82nd Airborne at Fort Bragg in North Carolina.

The third military death this year was a U.S. Marine from Cookeville, **Cpl. Lance Murphy Clark**. He was 21 years old.

Clark died in southern Iraq on Sept. 7 from a gunshot wound, his family was told.

Clark, who would have turned 22 on Dec. 5, graduated from Cookeville High School in 2004 and joined the U.S. Marines in April 2005. He completed basic training at Parris Island, South Carolina, and had been stationed at Camp Pendleton in California.

He had already completed one tour of duty in Iraq and was called back for a second tour in July, with plans to return to the U.S. in February.

Putnam County residents tried to honor those who lost their lives this year while serving in the military through participation in funeral processions.

Herald Citizen newspaper, Cookeville, TN: Sunday, Dec 30, 2007.

<http://www.ajlambert.com>

**Ronald Johnson Obt.**

**COOKEVILLE** -- Funeral services for **Ronald Johnson**, 45, of Lawrenceville, Ga., will be held Wednesday, Jan. 31, at 1 p.m. at Stevens Street Baptist Church. Burial with full military honors will be in Crest Lawn Memorial Cemetery.

Family will receive friends Tuesday, Jan. 30, from 2-9 p.m. at the funeral home and from 11 a.m. until time of service at the church.

Mr. Johnson died Tuesday, Jan. 23, 2007, in Bagdad, Iraq.

He was born Oct. 16, 1961, in Cookeville to Frances Harris Johnson and the late Solon Gerald Johnson.

Mr. Johnson worked as a helicopter pilot at Blackwater Securities for four years. He served for 20 years in the U.S. Army with a rank of Chief Warrant Officer 3 as a pilot in the Persian Gulf and Grenada. Mr. Johnson's awards included the Legion of Merit, Purple Heart, Meritorious Service Medal, Air Medal, Joint Service Commendation Medal, Army Commendation Medal, Good Conduct Medal, Nation Defense Service Medal, Armed Forces Expeditionary Medal, Southeast Asia Service Medal with two Bronze Service Stars, Humanitarian Service Medal, Professional Development Ribbon, Army Service Ribbon, Overseas Service Ribbon, NATO Medal, Kuwait Liberation Medal, Valorous Unit Award, Combat Infantry Badge, Expert Infantry Badge, Senior Army Aviator Badge and Master Parachutist Badge with Bronze Star and Ranger Tab.

His family includes his mother, Frances Harris Johnson of Gainesboro; two sons, Kyle J. and Ryan G. Johnson, both of Suwanee, Ga.; his sister, Mary R. Brown of Silver Point; his brother, Randy Johnson of Gainesboro; and the mother of his children, Darcie E. Johnson of Suwanee.

In addition to his father, Mr. Johnson was preceded in death by his grandparents, Jessie L. and Clio Barnes Harris and Joe and Willie Russell Johnson.

Memorial donations may be made to the education funds for his sons, Kyle and Ryan Johnson, at Bank East in Gainesboro or Bank of Putnam County in Baxter.

Please visit [www.mem.com](http://www.mem.com) to view Mr. Johnson's memorial video and to send a tribute to his family.

Bro. Johnny Fox will officiate the services.

Published January 30, 2007 11:26 AM CST : Herald Citizen Newspaper, Cookeville, TN



Herald-Citizen Photo/Ty Kerna, File  
**Bhong Subido, representing the 101st Airborne, salutes as Ronald Johnson's casket is carried to Crest Lawn Memorial Cemetery.**

(Photo: Bhong Subido, representing the 101<sup>st</sup> Airborne, salutes as **Ronald Johnson's** casket is carried to Crest Lawn).

**Sgt. Alex Van Aalten Obt.**

**COOKEVILLE** – Graveside services for **Sgt. Alex Van Aalten**, 21, of Monterey, will be held at 2 p.m. (E.S.T) on Tuesday, November 20, at Arlington National Cemetery.

The family will receive friends following services at the cemetery.

Hooper-Huddleston & Horner Funeral Home and Cremation Services in charge of arrangements.

Sunday, 18 November 2007, pg. A-8: Herald Citizen Newspaper, Cookeville, TN



Herald Citizen newspaper, Cookeville, TN: Thursday, 3 January 2008, pg. B-1.

CHS cadets at Arlington: **Sgt. Alex van Aalten**, a 2004 graduate of Cookeville High School, was laid to rest in Arlington National Cemetery, Arlington, VA, on November 20, 2007. Six cadets from the high school JROTC program attended. From left are cadets LT Kyle Chaffin, DPT Darrell Thompson, LT Matt Crabtree, LT Jonathan Hodges, LT Nathan Howell and CPT Alex Lawson. According to Joe Uzelac, JROTC instructor at Cookeville High School, Sgt. Alex van Aalten was a four-year member of the JROTC program at the school and touched all who knew him. Uzelac said, "His legacy lives to touch the lives of all cadets."

### Sgt. Alex Van Aalten



A former Monterey resident was killed during a second tour in Afghanistan after he stepped on a mine, according to his family.

The family of **Sgt. Alex Van Aalten**, 21, with the 82nd Airborne Division, was notified Friday of the incident in the Kandahar Region of Afghanistan where he was stationed.

Van Aalten's mother, Susan, said the family was at work when they learned what happened.

She said her son had been in Afghanistan since January and was scheduled to be there for 15 months. He wasn't able to give many details about what he was doing, but she said she believes he was involved in a large ongoing offensive operation.

Van Aalten also served in Iraq in 2005 as a gunner on a Humvee, his mother said.

Van Aalten, who attended Cookeville High School, was born in Orlando, Fla., but spent much of his life in Monterey, about 75 miles west of Knoxville.

His mother and father, Ed Van Aalten, live in Cumberland Cove, and his wife, Shana, lives in Sparta. He and his wife had been married for about two years, his mother said.

Van Aalten's mother said he signed up for the Army after graduating from high school and went to basic training at Fort Benning in Georgia. He then was assigned to the 82nd Airborne at Fort Bragg in North Carolina.

June would have marked his third year in the Army, and two weeks ago, Van Aalten signed up to serve for another six years, his mother said.

"He loved serving his country," she said. "He just was a really good person. He loved being in the Army. He believed in what he was doing."

### Alex Van Aalten Obt.

**ALGOOD** – Funeral services for Sgt. Alex van Aalten, 21, of the Cumberland Cove Community near Monterey, will be held today, Sunday, April 29, at 2 p.m. at Trinity Assembly in Algood. A private burial will be held at a later date. Sgt. van Aalten died Friday, April 20, 2007, during combat operations in Afghanistan. He was born September 2, 1985, in Orlando, FL, to Edward "Ed" and Susan Stokes van Aalten of Monterey.

Sgt. van Aalten was a 2004 graduate of Cookeville High School and was the brigade commander for the ROTC. He earned his black belt in karate and was a karate instructor with Jack Scott United Karate Studio.

He joined the Army in June 2004. He entered basic training at Fort Benning, GA, and served as a gunner on a humvee in Iraq in 2005. At the time of his death he was a Sgt. with the 82<sup>nd</sup> Airborne 1-508 PIR (Parachute Infantry Regiment) Delta Compnay at Fort Bragg, NC.

In addition to his parents, his family includes his wife, Shana Sorrell van Aalten, whom he married May 28, 2005; his brother, Dax van Aalten of New York, NY; his sister, Cpl. Nichole van Aalten stationed at Fort Bliss in El Paso, TX; his maternal grandfather, Herman Stokes of Monterey; his paternal grandmother,

Willa van Aalten of Brandon, FL; his father-in-law, David Sorrell and wife Kellie of Sparta; and mother-in-law, Connie Stinson and husband Tim of Sparta.

Sgt. van Aalten was preceded in death by his maternal grandmother, Ella May Fowler Stokes, and paternal grandfather, Edward van Aalten Sr.

Pall bearers will be the 82<sup>nd</sup> Airborne Honor Guard.

Memorial donations may be made to Sgt. Alexander van Aalten's memorial fund at U. S. Bank.

Rev. Mike Campbell will officiate the services.

Hooper & Huddleston & Horner are in charge of arrangements.

Herald Citizen Newspaper, Cookeville, TN: Sunday, 29 April 2007, pg. A-16.

### MEMORIAL DAY SERVICE HONORS VAN AALTEN

By Elizabeth Ayres

**COOKEVILLE** – “Freedom is not free.”



It was the most frequently repeated statement at the Memorial day observance, held yesterday outside the Putnam County Courthouse in front of the Supreme Sacrifice Wall.

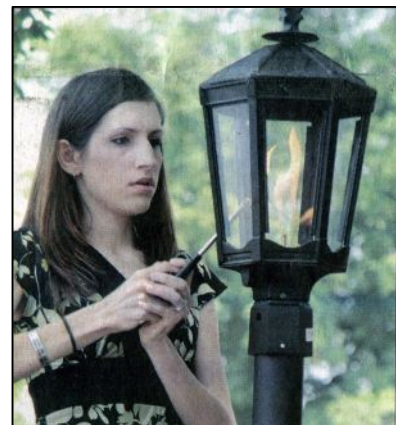
That phrase seems to ring truer now after the recent loss of a Putnam County son, Sgt. Alex van Aalten, who lost his life during military service on April 20 in the Dandahar region of Afghanistan.

*Sgt. Alex van Aalten's wife Shana van Aalten (left) and his parents Susan and Edward van Aalten reflect at the Supreme Sacrifice Wall outside the Putnam County Courthouse after Sgt. van Aalten's name was unveiled on the marble monument during the Memorial Day Observance program.*

A large number of Putnam County citizens came out with flags in hand to honor fallen soldiers of all wars for the 30-minute presentation, which included the unveiling of van Aalten's name on the Supreme Sacrifice Wall, the lighting of the new Eternal Flame fixture and the laying of a patriotic wreath.

Lt. Col. Mark Ochsenbein, keynote speaker for the event, stated that “less than 25 percent of American know the true meaning of Memorial Day... you ask children what Memorial Day means, and, you know what they say, they say that it's the day that the pools open.”

*Shana van Aalten, wife of the late Sgt. Alex van Aalten, lights the new Eternal Flame during the Memorial Day observance program held yesterday outside the Putnam County Courthouse. In addition to his wife, Sgt. Alex van Aalten's parents were also on hand to unveil their son's name on the Supreme Sacrifice Wall outside the courthouse.*



Ochsenbein stressed the meaning of the holiday by stating that Americans must continue to remember and memorialize those who were “answering the call of our nation to duty. Tennesseans have always answered the call to duty.”

He then read the stories of several Tennessee soldiers who were posthumously awarded the Congressional Medal of Honor in each war of the 20<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup> century, ending each history with “Tennessean, hero, he answered the call.

After Sgt. van Aalten’s Army history was read, his wife, Shana van Aalten, and his parents, Susan and Edward van Aalten, approached the Supreme Sacrifice Wall to unveil their loved one’s name engraved in the marble. As the family clutched each other for support, Shana slowly ran her fingers over the letters of her husband’s name.

Sgt. van Aalten’s wife then lit the Eternal Flame, a gas-lit black lantern above the marble monument. LCDR Augusta Miller of the Navy Nurse Corps and Sgt. Ron Rami of the 101<sup>st</sup> Airborne Division, both Vietnam veterans, placed a red, white and blue wreath in front of the monument. Shana van Aalten was presented a framed print of the Supreme Sacrifice Wall before the Veterans Honor Guard gave a 21-gun salute and played “Taps.” The service was closed by a benediction by Charles Williams.

The service was presented by the Veteran’s Trustees organization.



(LEFT) Lt. Col. Mark Ochsenbein gave the keynote address at the observance program. (ABOVE) The Memorial Day observance drew a large crowd to the Putnam County Courthouse in Cookeville Monday.

### HUNDREDS LINE STREETS TO PAY THEIR RESPECTS

Lindsay McReynolds  
Herald-Citizen Staff

**COOKEVILLE** -- Hundreds of people lined the streets last night between White County and Cookeville to pay respect to a U.S. Marine from Cookeville who was killed in Iraq last week.

The body of 21-year-old **Lance Cpl. Lance Murphy Clark** arrived at the Upper Cumberland Regional Airport on a Kalitta Charters plane shortly after 6 last night, where more than a hundred people including family, friends, members of law enforcement, emergency and rescue crews and the Patriot Guard were waiting.

The plane was greeted by a salute from seven uniformed U.S. Marines, who escorted Lance Cpl. Clark's casket from the plane to the hearse of Hooper Huddleston & Horner Funeral Home.

This is the third time U.S. Marine Gunnery Sgt. Roger Kraft has had to coordinate a funeral for a U.S. Marine since he began his job with the 3rd Battalion 3rd Marines in Nashville five months ago.

Gunnery Sgt. Kraft's responsibility is to coordinate the Patriot Guard, a group of volunteers providing escorts for military funeral processions, with police and to carry out the standards of the U.S. Marine Corps from the time the family is notified of a U.S. Marine's death to the time the Marine is laid to rest.

**Lance Cpl. Clark** will receive the same treatment as countless other Marines who have been killed while serving their country, beginning with the arrival of his body last night to casket guard by U.S. Marines during visitation tonight, tomorrow night and Saturday to the 21-gun salute at the gravesite on Saturday and the presentation of American flags to Lance Cpl. Clark's family.

"There will be at least 20 to 25 Marines at the gravesite to honor Lance," Gunnery Sgt. Kraft said. "This is just the first step."

The Patriot Guard also came out last night with flags and motorcycles to honor Lance Cpl. Clark.

The national group regularly provides escorts in military-type processions.

"We're here when we're invited by the family," said Annette Robeck, Tennessee's captain for the Patriot Guard who came from Antioch to lead last night's group. "We're here to escort this hero home. We're showing him the honor and respect he deserves."

As the procession honoring Lance Cpl. Clark made its way from the Upper Cumberland Regional Airport in White County to the Hooper Huddleston & Horner Funeral Home on South Jefferson Avenue in Cookeville, hundreds of supporters lined the streets waving flags and signs.

Family and friends traveling in cars behind the hearse carrying Lance Cpl. Clark wiped away tears as they drove through crowds, many with their hats off and their hands over their hearts.

All along South Jefferson Avenue, people crowded in front of gas stations and restaurants. Those working at businesses along South Jefferson Avenue came outside to see the procession.

A giant-sized flag welcomed the procession as it neared the Putnam County Courthouse, and even more people stood waving flags.

One man said he came from Livingston to pay his respect to Lance Cpl. Clark.

"The appreciation of what he did so we can be free," said Jerry Cravins, who came to Cookeville to honor Lance Cpl. Clark with his wife and friends.

The procession ended at Hooper Huddleston & Horner Funeral Home on South Jefferson Avenue.

Those who wish to pay their respects to Lance Cpl. Clark may also line the streets again on Saturday during a procession to the gravesite where the U.S. Marine will be laid to rest.

Lance Cpl. Clark's funeral procession is expected to leave Stevens Street Baptist Church at 1:30 p.m. on Saturday following the funeral.

From there, the procession will travel north on Willow Avenue, east on Spring Street, then north on Highway 111 to Livingston. From there, the procession will travel north on Highway 84 to the **Bethlehem Cemetery.**

## **REMEMBER OUR HEROES**

**Marine Lance Cpl. Lance M. Clark**, 21, of Cookeville, Tenn.

L Cpl. Clark was assigned to 1st Battalion, 1st Marine Regiment, 1st Marine Division, I Marine Expeditionary Force, Camp Pendleton, Calif.; died Sept. 7, 2007 in a nonhostile incident in Anbar province, Iraq.

**Cookeville Herald Citizen -- COOKEVILLE** -- A U.S. Marine from Cookeville has been killed in Iraq, his family has been told. **Lance Corporal Lance Murphy Clark**, 21, of Jager Lane, Cookeville, the son of John Dale and Susie Scott of Cookeville and Jackie and Pam Clark of Chestnut Mound, died in southern Iraq on Sept. 7, Marine officers told the Scott family late Friday night.

More information, including details of when his body will be returned, was expected to be given to the family today, according to LCpl. Clark's mother, Susie Murphy Scott.

She said U.S. Marine officers knocked on her door about 10:30 p.m. Friday to inform her of her son's death. They reported that he died of a gunshot wound, but had no further information at the time.

LCpl. Clark, who would have turned 22 on Dec. 5, graduated from Cookeville High School in 2004 and joined the U.S. Marines in April of 2005. He completed basic training at Parris Island, South Carolina, and had recently been stationed at Camp Pendleton in California, his mother said.

He had already completed one tour of duty in Iraq and was called back for a second tour in July, with plans to return to the U.S. in February, she said.

"He had been gone this time about eight weeks and had called us three times since then," she said.

"He had given me the new address, and I sent him some things -- one of those little spray fans because it's so hot over there, some candy, some socks and underwear -- I believe he had had time to receive that package."

She said her son told her before being deployed to the war, "Mom, if I don't get back home, I'll be waiting for you in heaven."

"He was a good person, a sweet boy that never gave us any trouble," she said. "He was always concerned about how other people felt."

He was a member of Eastwood Baptist Church, she said, and he was very close to his brother, Travis Lee Clark and his stepbrothers, Greg Scott and Jason Scott of Cookeville and Kevin and Adam Huff of Chestnut Mound.

His family also includes his maternal grandmother, Jessie Carmack Murphy of Cookeville. He was preceded in death by his maternal grandfather, Donald W. Murphy, and his paternal grandparents, Lanzy and Opal Clark.

He joined the Marines after the war had already started, fully aware of the danger, his mother said. He liked the military life, but was looking forward to getting back home, she said. He often mentioned his grandfather, the late Donald W. Murphy, who served in the U.S. Army during World War II, saying that "if Pa could do that, I can do this."

LCpl. Clark was a boy who was always interested in cars, his mother said. He loved to work on vehicles,



and he liked guns and hunting and fishing, as well as wrestling and other sports, she said.

In the Marines, he had won awards for his shooting skills.

Marine Lance Cpl. Lance M. Clark was killed in Iraq on 9/07/07.

**Friday, September 07, 2007**

*posted by Terri Rager at [8:29 AM](#)*

### LANCE CPL. CLARK HONORED WITH MEDAL

[Megan Trotter](#)

Herald-Citizen Staff

Sunday, Jan 13, 2008, pg. A-3



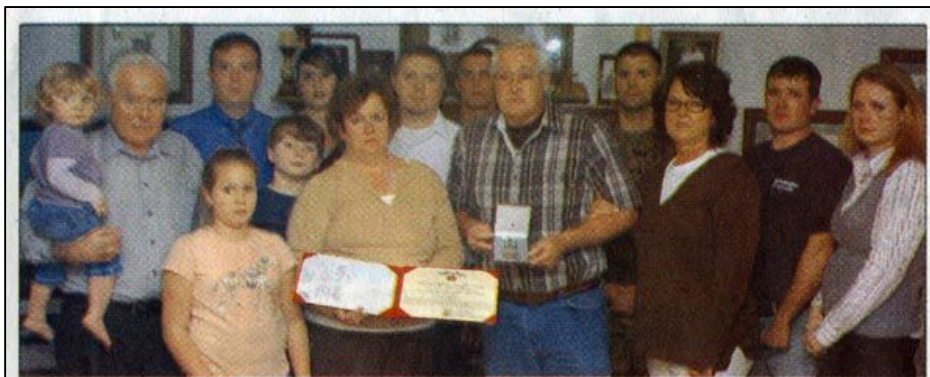
Just over four months after his death, friends and family of **Lance Cpl. Lance Murphy Clark** gathered again for a ceremony to honor his sacrifice.

Born in Cookeville, he graduated from Cookeville High School in 2004, and joined the Marines the following year. He was on his second tour of duty in Iraq and due to return to the United States this February, however in September 2007, he lost his life from the results of a gunshot wound.

Gunnery Sgt. Roger Kraft and Lt. Jason Pollard presented the Navy and Marine Corps Achievement Medal to the parents and step-parents of Lance Cpl. Clark on the evening of Jan. 8, 2008. The medal, depicting a rope-entwined anchor surrounded by four stars, is only given to those in the Navy or Marines whose noteworthy actions exceed what is required or expected of them.

According to the certificate presented along with the medal, the award was presented to Lance Cpl. Clark, "for heroic achievement in the superior performance of his duties ... from July to September 2007, in support of Operation Iraqi Freedom." The certificate goes on to explain in detail the reason for the award. While under fire, the unit's only automatic grenade launcher stopped working. Lance Cpl. Clark left his vehicle and repaired the weapon while under heavy enemy fire, and dedicated himself to providing cover fire for his comrades. His "instinctive actions and accurate fire enabled the Marines to quickly defeat the enemy's attack. Lance Cpl. Clark's initiative, perseverance and total dedication to duty reflected credit upon him and were in keeping with the highest traditions of the Marine Corps and the United States Naval Service." The award is signed by J.R. Allen, Brigadier General, U.S. Marine Corps.

In an accompanying letter to the family, Brig. Gen. Allen writes, "The memory of your son's heroic life and the impact it left on his fellow Marines and Sailors will not be forgotten. He truly embodied the Marine Corps values of 'Honor, Courage and Commitment.' He will be greatly missed."



Herald-Citizen Photo/Camille Fliss

Family and friends of the late Lance Cpl. Clark gather to receive a medal on his behalf. Back, from left, Dale Scott holding Chloe Clark, Jason Scott, Ryan Scott, Dottie Scott, Greg Scott, Lt. Jason Polard, Gunnery Sgt. Roger Kraft, Travis Clark and Dusty Clark. Front, from left, Alexis Clark, Susie Scott, Jackie Clark and Pam Clark.



## HONORING A FALLEN HERO

**State Representative Henry Fincher** (right) and Senator Charlotte Burks recently sponsored a Joint Resolution by both the Tennessee House and the Tennessee Senate honoring the late **Ronald Johnson**, who died while serving his country in Iraq. The resolution honored Johnson's history of service and self-sacrifice. Accepting the resolution is Johnson's mother, **Frances Harris Johnson** (left).

Picture: Herald – Citizen Newspaper, Cookeville, TN: Monday, 2 April 2007: Living, Pg. A-8.

## *Sorrell - van Aalten*

David and Kellie Sorrell and Connie and Tim Stinson of Sparta announce the engagement of their daughter, Shana Sorrell, to Alex van Aalten, son of Ed and Susan van Aalten of Monterey.

The bride-to-be is a future 2005 graduate of White County High School. She will attend Tennessee Tech University in the fall. She is employed at Video Max in Sparta.

The future groom is a 2004 graduate of Cookeville High School and is a Private 1st Class in the U.S. Army, 82nd Airborne Division, stationed at Ft. Bragg, N.C. He will be deployed to Afghanistan in June. The couple will wed May 28.



*Shana Sorrell and  
Alex van Aalten*

## Sgt. Alex van Aalten

Born Sept. 2, 1985

K.I.A. Apr. 20, 2007

Son of Ed and Susan van Aalten, husband to Shana van Aalten. Served in Iraq and Afghanistan with the Army 82nd Airborne 1/508 PIR.

Soon to be laid to rest at Arlington National Cemetery.

Alex is our son, son-in-law, brother, husband and hero. He

loved serving his country, but first of all, he loved the Lord and his wife, Shana, with all his heart. We will forever love, miss and honor him. Alex made the Ultimate Sacrifice.



WE SALUTE OUR VETERANS

Herald-Citizen, Cookeville, TN: Sunday, 11 November 2007, pg. A-9.

## L.Cpl. Lance Murphy Clark

Born Dec. 5, 1985

Died Sept. 7, 2007

Son of John Dale and Susie Scott and Jackie and Pam Clark.

Clark joined the Marines in April 2005. He was stationed at Camp Pendleton in California. Clark died in southern Iraq while serving his country.



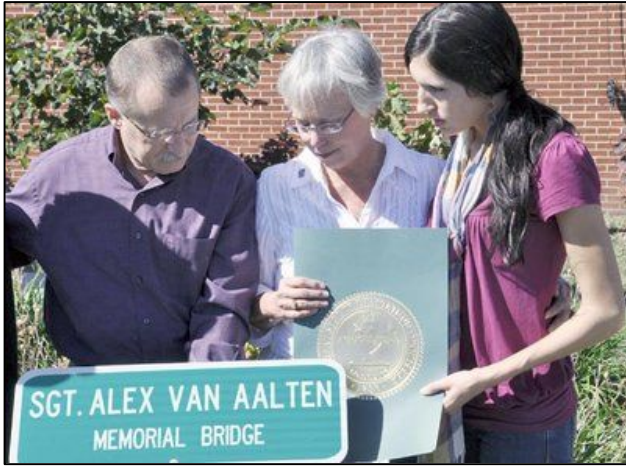
WE SALUTE OUR VETERANS

Herald-Citizen, Cookeville, TN: Sunday, 11 November 2007, pg. A-9.

## **I-40 BRIDGE NAMED IN MEMORY OF FALLEN SOLDIER**

by Herald-Citizen Staff

**MONTEREY** -- The Interstate 40 Bridge in Monterey was dedicated to the late Sgt. Alex van Aalten in a ceremony on Friday at the VFW Hall in Monterey.



The Interstate 40 Bridge in Monterey was dedicated to the late Sgt. Alex van Aalten in a ceremony on Friday at the VFW Hall in Monterey. Sgt. van Aalten, 21, died April 20, 2007, from wounds suffered during a rescue mission of Dutch troops in Sangin, Afghanistan. Admiring the new sign are (from left) Alex's father Ed van Aalten, mother Susan van Aalten and wife Shana van Aalten.

Sgt. van Aalten, 21, died April 20, 2007, from wounds suffered during a rescue mission of Dutch troops in Sangin, Afghanistan. He was

serving with the 82nd Airborne, 1-508 Parachute Infantry Regiment, Delta Company at Fort Bragg, N.C.

Sgt. van Aalten, a Monterey resident, was a 2004 graduate of Cookeville High School, where he served as the Brigade Commander for the Reserve Officer Training Corps. He joined the U.S. Army in June 2004 and served as a gunner on a Humvee in Iraq in 2005. He had been in Afghanistan since January 2007.

Sgt. van Aalten was awarded a Bronze Star and a Purple Heart, and was posthumously awarded the Netherlands' Gold Medal of Merit of the Minister of Defense.

"Sergeant van Aalten gave his life to save others and to preserve freedom both overseas and here at home," State Senator Charlotte Burks said.

"He is truly a hero."

As a result of Senate Joint Resolution 335, which Sen. Burks sponsored, the bridge on Interstate 40, that spans U.S. Highway 70N between Exit 300 and Exit 301 at Monterey, has been designated the "Sgt. Alex van Aalten Memorial Bridge."

The dedication ceremony included members of the van Aalten family, Sen. Burks, Rep. Henry Fincher of Cookeville and Cmdr. Skip Pennington.

<http://www.ajlambert.com>