

Throughout his career, Robert Oliver has proven to be a highly effective leader who was always committed to excellence in public service. As he gets ready to spend more time on other causes and endeavors of interest to him, we thank him for his service and we wish him continued success and best of luck for the future.

HONORING THE LIFE OF CITY COUNCILMEMBER MATT GARCIA OF THE FAIRFIELD, CA CITY COUNCIL

**HON. ELLEN O. TAUSCHER**

OF CALIFORNIA

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

*Tuesday, September 9, 2008*

Mrs. TAUSCHER. Madam Speaker, I rise to recognize Councilmember Matt Garcia, who faithfully served the city of Fairfield and whose life was tragically taken last week.

Councilman Garcia, in his 22 years, made an indelible mark on the city of Fairfield and as a young leader he inspired many to make this a better world through service and sacrifice.

As the youngest member ever elected to the Fairfield City Council, Matt understood the potential for young people to effect change in their communities.

He coached Little League, rejuvenated the Fairfield Youth Commission, and vigorously supported the Police Athletics League; Councilman Garcia was a tireless advocate for the youth of Fairfield.

At the age of 16, Matt told his fellow students that he would become the mayor of Fairfield one day and never lost sight of that goal.

From his days at Armijo High to his victorious race for City Council, Matt was able to bring together diverse people and organizations.

My thoughts and prayers are with Councilmember Garcia's family and our community at this very difficult time. I am deeply saddened by his passing and know his memory will live on for generations through the work of those he inspired.

IN RECOGNITION OF JOHN W. RODGERS—SUPERINTENDENT OF SCHOOLS, SANTA ROSA COUNTY SCHOOL DISTRICT

**HON. JEFF MILLER**

OF FLORIDA

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

*Tuesday, September 9, 2008*

Mr. MILLER of Florida. Madam Speaker, I rise to recognize my good friend and neighbor, Superintendent Johnny Rodgers. Johnny has been the Superintendent of Schools, Santa Rosa County since 1999. The people of Santa Rosa County re-elected him twice since then and he is retiring from public service at the end of this year.

A career educator, the Pensacola News Journal recently wrote "For years, Santa Rosa County has relished the title of being a high-performing public school system." As Johnny gets ready to turn over the reins to a new superintendent, he should be proud of how good a school system he has led and mentored.

Johnny started his life of public service in 1968 in the United States Air Force. He served honorably in Vietnam and Thailand and upon returning to civilian life, Johnny received his bachelor's and master's degrees from the University of West Florida. Johnny doesn't talk much about his service during the Vietnam conflict but we all know how important his contributions were and I want to thank him again for his service during a time of war.

Before Johnny's current position, he served in numerous public education positions in Santa Rosa County, including teacher, coach, assistant principal and principal. Named Elementary School Principal of the Year in 1994 and Middle School Principal of the Year in 1997, Johnny has done it all.

He has been married to the former Vick Rogers for 40 years and together they have two children and four grandchildren.

HONORING THE MEMORY OF JORGE ALBERTO SUBIRATS

**HON. JO BONNER**

OF ALABAMA

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

*Tuesday, September 9, 2008*

Mr. BONNER. Madam Speaker, the city of Mobile and the State of Alabama, recently lost a dear friend, and I rise today to honor Jorge Alberto Subirats and pay tribute to his memory.

A native of Havana, Cuba, Jorge came to the United States at the age of 12. He, along with his brothers and sisters, left Cuba in 1961 and flew to Miami. Jorge and his siblings soon moved to Birmingham, Alabama, where they were joined by the rest of their family in 1963. Jorge graduated from John Carroll High School in Birmingham in 1967 and from Auburn University in 1972.

A resident of Mobile for 36 years, Jorge was perhaps most widely known for his service as a realtor with Roberts Brothers for 31 years. He was consistently one of the company's top agents each year, an achievement due in large part to the trust and admiration he earned from his clients.

Jorge met every definition of a community leader—he served as a high school teacher and coach, a swim and dive coach, and a Sunday school leader. He was active in many civic organizations, including the Mobile Area Kiwanis Club and the Mobile Association of Realtors.

Madam Speaker, I ask my colleagues to join me in remembering a dedicated community leader, a friend to many throughout Alabama, as well as a wonderful husband and devoted father. Jorge Alberto Subirats will be dearly missed by his family—his wife of 25 years, Valerie Jean Subirats; their four children, Lindsey Loper, Michael Jorge Subirats, Laura Katherine Subirats, and Katherine Anne Subirats; his mother, Elvira Margaret Subirats; his brothers, Fernando Subirats, Gustavo Subirats, and Luis Subirats; and his two sisters, Silvia Theye and Margaret Hopkins—as well as the many countless friends he leaves behind. Our thoughts and prayers are with them all during this difficult time.

TRIBUTE TO 173RD AIRBORNE PARATROOPERS

**HON. JO ANN EMERSON**

OF MISSOURI

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

*Tuesday, September 9, 2008*

Mrs. EMERSON. Madam Speaker, I rise to recognize and to submit for the RECORD a story concerning the events of July 13, 2008, and an account of the heroics of the paratroopers of the 173rd Airborne. Reports such as this one remind every American of the bravery, the courage, and the willingness to sacrifice of every servicemember in the U.S. Armed Forces—but this tale is an exceptional example. I am honored to share it with you and with the American people.

I'm sure you heard about 9 soldiers being killed in Afghanistan a couple of weeks ago. As AP reported it, it was a "setback", the "newly established base" there was 'abandoned' by the Americans. That, of course, was the extent of their coverage.

Steve Mraz of Stars and Stripes and Jeff Emanuel tell the rest of the story. Emanuel, who went out and dug into the story sets the enemy force at 500 while AP sets it at 200. Frankly I'm much more inclined to believe Emanuel than AP.

July 13, 2008 was the date, and Jeff Emanuel, an independent combat reporter sets the scene:

Three days before the attack, 45 U.S. Paratroopers from the 173d Airborne [Brigade Combat Team], accompanied by 25 Afghan soldiers, made their way to Kunar province, a remote area in the northeastern Afghanistan-Pakistan border area, and established the beginnings of a small Combat Outpost (COP). Their movement into the area was noticed, and their tiny numbers and incomplete fortifications were quickly taken advantage of.

A combined force of up to 500 Taliban and al Qaeda fighters quickly moved into the nearby village of Wanat and prepared for their assault by evicting unallied residents and according to an anonymous senior Afghan defense ministry official, "us [ing] their houses to attack us."

Tribesmen in the town stayed behind "and helped the insurgents during the fight," the provincial police chief, told The Associated Press.

Dug-in mortar firing positions were created, and with that indirect fire, as well as heavy machine gun and RPG fire from fixed positions, Taliban and al Qaeda fighters rushed the COP from three sides.

As Emanuel notes, the odds were set. 500 vs. 70. Even so, Emanuel entitled his article, "An Alamo With a Different Ending." The 500 terrorists apparently didn't realize they were attacking US Army paratroopers.

The unit in question was 2nd Platoon, Company C, 2nd Battalion, 503rd Infantry Regiment (Airborne), 173rd Airborne Brigade Combat Team, led by 1LT Jonathan Brostrom.

The first RPG and machine gun fire came at dawn, strategically striking the forward operating base's mortar pit. The insurgents next sighted their RPGs on the tow truck inside the combat outpost, taking it out.

That was around 4:30 a.m.

This was not a haphazard attack. The reportedly 500 insurgents fought from several positions. They aimed to overrun the new base. The U.S. Soldiers knew it and fought like hell. They knew their lives were on the line.

The next target was the FOB's observation post, where nine soldiers were positioned on

a tiny hill about 50 to 75 meters from the base. Of those nine, five died, and at least three others—Spc. Tyler Stafford among them—were wounded.

When the attack began, Stafford grabbed his M-240 machine gun off a north-facing sandbag wall and moved it to an east-facing sandbag wall.

Moments later, RPGs struck the north-facing wall, knocking Stafford out of the fighting position and wounding another soldier.

Stafford thought he was on fire so he rolled around, regaining his senses. Nearby, Cpl. Gunnar Zwilling, who later died in the fight, had a stunned look on his face.

Immediately, a grenade exploded by Stafford, blowing him down to a lower terrace at the observation post and knocking his helmet off. Stafford put his helmet back on and noticed how badly he was bleeding.

Cpl. Matthew Phillips was close by, so Stafford called to him for help.

Phillips was preparing to throw a grenade and shot a look at Stafford that said, "Give me a second. I gotta go kill these guys first."

This was only about 30 to 60 seconds into the attack.

Kneeling behind a sandbag wall, Phillips pulled the grenade pin, but just after he threw it an RPG exploded at his position. The tail of the RPG smacked Stafford's helmet. The dust cleared. Phillips was slumped over, his chest on his knees and his hands by his side. Stafford called out to his buddy three or four times, but Phillips never answered or moved.

"When I saw Phillips die, I looked down and was bleeding pretty good, that's probably the most scared I was at any point," Stafford said.

"Then I kinda had to calm myself down and be like, 'All right, I gotta go try to do my job.'"

The soldier from Parker, Colo., loaded his 9 mm handgun, crawled up to their fighting position, stuck the pistol over the sandbags and fired.

Stafford saw Zwilling's M-4 rifle nearby so he loaded it, put it on top of the sandbag and fired. Another couple RPGs struck the sandbag wall Stafford used as cover. Shrapnel pierced his hands.

Stafford low-crawled to another fighting position where Cpl. Jason Bogar, Sgt. Matthew Gobble and Sgt. Ryan Pitts were located. Stafford told Pitts that the insurgents were within grenade-tossing range. That got Pitts' attention.

With blood running down his face, Pitts threw a grenade and then crawled to the position from where Stafford had just come. Pitts started chucking more grenades.

The firefight intensified. Bullets cut down tree limbs that fell on the soldiers. RPGs constantly exploded.

Back at Stafford's position, so many bullets were coming in that the soldiers could not poke their heads over their sandbag wall. Bogar stuck an M-249 machine gun above the wall and squeezed off rounds to keep fire on the insurgents. In about five minutes, Bogar fired about 600 rounds, causing the M-249 to seize up from heat.

At another spot on the observation post, Cpl. Jonathan Ayers laid down continuous fire from an M-240 machine gun, despite drawing small-arms and RPG fire from the enemy. Ayers kept firing until he was shot and killed.

Cpl. Pruitt Rainey radioed the FOB with a casualty report, calling for help. Of the nine soldiers at the observation post, Ayers and Phillips were dead, Zwilling was unaccounted for, and three were wounded.

Additionally, several of the soldiers' machine guns couldn't fire because of damage. And they needed more ammo.

Rainey, Bogar and another soldier jumped out of their fighting position with the third

soldier of the group launching a shoulder-fired missile.

All this happened within the first 20 minutes of the fight.

Platoon leader 1st Lt. Jonathan Brostrom and Cpl. Jason Hovater arrived at the observation post to reinforce the soldiers. By that time, the insurgents had breached the perimeter of the observation post.

Gunfire rang out, and Rainey shouted, "He's right behind the sandbag."

Brostrom could be heard shouting about the insurgent as well.

More gunfire and grenade explosions ensued. Back in the fighting position, Gobble fired a few quick rounds. Gobble then looked to where the soldiers were fighting and told Stafford the soldiers were dead.

Of the nine soldiers who died in the battle, at least seven fell in fighting at the observation post.

The insurgents then started chucking rocks at Gobble and Stafford's fighting position, hoping that the soldiers might think the rocks were grenades, causing them to jump from the safety of their fighting hole.

One rock hit a tree behind Stafford and landed directly between his legs.

He braced himself for an explosion. He then realized it was a rock.

Stafford didn't have a weapon, and Gobble was low on ammo.

Gobble told Stafford they had to get back to the FOB. They didn't realize that Pitts was still alive in another fighting position at the observation post. Gobble and Stafford crawled out of their fighting hole.

Gobble looked again to where the soldiers had been fighting and reconfirmed to Stafford that Brostrom, Rainey, Bogar and others were dead.

Gobble and Stafford low-crawled and ran back to the FOB. Coming into the FOB, Stafford was asked by a sergeant what was going on at the observation post. Stafford told him all the soldiers there were dead.

Stafford lay against a wall, and his fellow soldiers put a tourniquet on him.

From the OP, Pitts got on the radio and told his comrades he was alone.

Volunteers were asked for to go to the OP. SSG Jesse Queck sums up the reaction to the call: "When you ask for volunteers to run across an open field to a reinforced OP that almost everybody is injured at, and everybody volunteers, it feels good."

There were a lot of guys that made me proud, putting themselves and their lives on the line so their buddies could have a chance."

At least three soldiers went to the OP to rescue Pitts, but they suffered wounds after encountering RPG and small-arms fire, but Pitts survived the battle.

At that time, air support arrived in the form of Apache helicopters, A-10s and F-16s, performing bombing and strafing runs.

The whole FOB was covered in dust and smoke, looking like something out of an old Western movie.

"I've never seen the enemy do anything like that," said Sgt. Jacob Walker, who was medically evacuated off the FOB in one of the first helicopters to arrive. "It's usually three RPGs, some sporadic fire and then they're gone . . . I don't where they got all those RPGs. That was crazy."

Two hours after the first shots were fired, Stafford made his way—with help—to the medevac helicopter that arrived.

"It was some of the bravest stuff I've ever seen in my life, and I will never see it again because those guys," Stafford said, then paused.

"Normal humans wouldn't do that. You're not supposed to do that—getting up and firing back when everything around you is popping and whizzing and trees, branches com-

ing down and sandbags exploding and RPGs coming in over your head . . . It was a fist-fight then, and those guys held 'em off."

Stafford offered a guess as to why his fellow soldiers fought so hard.

"Just hardcoreness I guess," he said. "Just guys kicking ass, basically."

"Just making sure that we look scary enough that you don't want to come in and try to get us."

Jeff Emanuel summed the fight up very well:

"Perhaps the most important takeaway from that encounter, though, is the one that the mainstream media couldn't be bothered to pay attention long enough to learn: that, not for the first time, a contingent of American soldiers that was outnumbered by up to a twenty-to-one ratio soundly and completely repulsed a complex, pre-planned assault by those dedicated enough to their cause to kill themselves in its pursuit."

That kind of heroism and against-all-odds success is and has been a hallmark of America's fighting men and women, and it is one that is worthy of all attention we can possibly give it."

Of the original 45 paratroopers, 15 were wounded and The Sky Soldiers lost 9 killed in action in the attack. They were:

1LT Jonathan Brostrom of Aiea, Hawaii  
SGT Israel Garcia of Long Beach, California  
SPC Matthew Phillips of Jasper, Georgia  
SPC Pruitt Rainey of Haw River, North Carolina  
SPC Jonathan Ayers of Snellville, Georgia  
SPC Jason Bogar of Seattle, Washington  
SPC Sergio Abad of Morganfield, Kentucky  
SPC Jason Hovater of Clinton, Tennessee  
SPC Gunnar Zwilling of Florissant, Missouri.

Of the 9 that were lost, Sgt. Walker says:

"I just hope these guys' wives and their children understand how courageous their husbands and dads were. They fought like warriors."

They fought like warriors.

Last week, there were 9 funerals in the United States. 9 warriors were laid to rest. 9 warriors who had given their all for their country.

All proud members of a brotherhood that will carry on in their name. They fought and died in what most would consider impossible circumstances, and yet they succeeded. A nameless fight in a distant war which, until you understand the facts, could be spun as a defeat. It wasn't. And it is because of the pride, courage and fighting spirit of this small unit that it was, in fact, a victory against overwhelming odds. And there's little doubt, given that pride and given that fighting spirit, that they'll be back to reestablish the base, this time with quite a few more soldiers just like the ones who "kicked ass" the last time there.

#### HONORING THE SERVICE OF JUDY GILBERT-GOULD AND HER WORK WITH THE GREATER MIAMI JEWISH FEDERATION

#### HON. ILEANA ROS-LEHTINEN

OF FLORIDA

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Tuesday, September 9, 2008

Ms. ROS-LEHTINEN. Madam Speaker, I am pleased to honor one of south Florida's great citizens, Judy Gilbert-Gould. She has spent most of her life working on behalf of the Greater Miami Jewish Federation. She has spent a lifetime of service to the community. For the past 25 years, Judy has been advocating for equality and respect for Jews across the globe.