

SFC Lake: 'Having him around was a charm'

By Sgt. Jim Greenhill
National Guard Bureau

ARLINGTON, Va. – Sgt. 1st Class Floyd Lake died in Iraq on Jan. 20.

A father of five, Lake, 43, of Beltsville, Md., and St. Thomas, U.S. Virgin Islands, was among 10 Army National Guard and two active Army Soldiers killed in the crash of a UH-60 Black Hawk helicopter near Al Jadidah, northeast of Baghdad.

“He was a wonderful individual,” Sgt. Maj. Tony Davis told Capital News Service. “Having him around was a charm.”

A memorial service is scheduled for 8:30 a.m. on Feb. 5 in St. Thomas, to be followed by a service with military honors at 1 p.m. at Hyle Funeral Home, 129 Peters Rest, Christiansted, St. Croix, U.S. Virgin Islands, with internment immediately afterwards.

The crash claimed the highest number of Guardmembers to die in a single combat incident since at least the Korean War (1950-53), National Guard Bureau (NGB) officials said.

Lake was the property book noncommissioned officer for an NGB liaison officer (LNO) team in Iraq. Before the August deployment – for which he volunteered – he was the Army National Guard logistics noncommissioned officer for three NGB divisions, on assignment from the Virgin Islands Army National Guard since 2004. The position gave him responsibility for more than \$3 million worth of equipment.

Lake was one of two Virgin Island National Guard Soldiers killed in the crash. The other was Lt. Col. David C. Canegata III of St. Croix. Brig. Gen. Eddy Charles, the territory’s adjutant general, called both men “heroes” and “warriors,” the *St. Thomas Source* reported. Lake was scheduled to come home in March.

“The death of these two Virgin Islands Soldiers is a reminder that ... our men and women who have served and are now serving in both Iraq and Afghanistan are putting their lives on the line for our country and for the freedoms we hold so dear,” Virgin Islands’ Gov. John deJongh Jr. said.

“Words are not enough to express the sadness that I feel about the passing of our brave heroes,” Virgin Islands Congressional Delegate Donna Christian-Christensen said in a statement. “They were among our best and served their country and our islands with honor. I would like to extend my sympathies to their families, friends and to the National Guard family, for whom this loss is personal.”

Christian-Christensen’s husband is a retired Guardmember. “You are the ones who have borne the brunt of this conflict, and we salute your strength and your fortitude,” she said.

“Virgin Islanders have again sacrificed two of our native sons in demonstration of our commitment and loyalty to the interests of the United States of America,” said Senate President Usie Richards in a statement for the Virgin Islands’ 27th Legislature.

Other Virgin Islands political and civic leaders also released statements in a community deeply affected by both deaths. Though he was working fulltime at

NGB, Lake often told stories about his homeland and shared the Virgin Islands' culture with coworkers.

Two other members of the LNO team also died in the crash. They were Col. Paul Kelly, 45, from Virginia, the team's commander, and Command Sgt. Maj. Robert Haller, 49, from Maryland.

"I am deeply saddened by the loss of these outstanding National Guard Soldiers and warriors," said LTG H Steven Blum, chief of the National Guard Bureau. "I cherish their service, honor their sacrifice and mourn with their families. These National Guard Soldiers were bearers of the torch of freedom carried from one generation of Americans to the next since 1636. We will remember them in honor and gratitude."

The LNO team was conducting a liaison mission with National Guard Affairs, Multi-National Corps – Iraq. The Black Hawk was returning to Baghdad after site visits.

The Army National Guard Readiness Center in Arlington, Va. where Lake worked was a community "buttressed between pride and grief," Lt. Gen. Clyde Vaughn, director of the Army National Guard, wrote in a Jan. 24 letter to the National Guard family.

"They were our family," Vaughn said. "They were the leaders that guided us as a team, the mentors who grew us as Soldiers, the friends we shared our lives with and the smiling faces we still see so clearly in the halls."

Lake enlisted in the regular Army in 1988, serving two years as a stock-record clerk at Fort Polk, La., the *St. Thomas Source* reported. He joined the Virgin Islands Army Guard in 1990. He was the material control and handling supervisor for the 662nd Field Service Company in St. Thomas before he moved to St. Croix in 1991 to become the warehouse foreman for the U.S. Property and Fiscal Office. Lake graduated from Ivanna Eudora Kean High School, St. Thomas, in 1984.

At NGB, Lake's responsibilities included providing equipment for more than 250 personnel in three divisions. Officials cited his professionalism, dedication, leadership and care for colleagues, praising his contributions to Army National Guard readiness.

"He took care of his missions and was meticulous about his duties," Felicia Barrett, logistics support branch chief, told Capital News Service. "He was one of our best Soldiers. No matter what mission we gave him, this Soldier would move out."

When he first came to NGB, Lake was a staff sergeant doing the work of a master sergeant, Davis said.

Lake is survived by his wife, Linda, and five children, J'Nelle, Floyd Jr., Andre, Keeshawn and Tamile. Other survivors include his mother of Jacksonville, Fla.

Two of Lake's children, Andre and Tamile, lived with him in Maryland. The other three, from an earlier marriage, live in the Virgin Islands and in Georgia. Lake ran and exercised with his children in Maryland and went to their elementary school to join activities there, Capital News Service reported.

Lake was a consistent stellar performer on Army Physical Fitness Tests. "He was always out in front, beating most of us," Davis said.

National Guard LNO teams serve in Afghanistan and Iraq and are assigned to Operation Jump Start, the Guard's support for the U.S. Border Patrol along this country's border with Mexico, among other places and operations.

Team members tell ground component commanders how the NGB can support the war fight, and they tell the NGB and Lt. Gen. Vaughn about anticipated requirements. Liaison officers also inform the Army National Guard director about the needs, welfare, equipment issues and morale of Citizen-Soldiers and coordinate site visits.

"Every task this team handled, every mission they entered into was to ensure our National Guard personnel could effectively fight for a fledgling freedom in a land few would dare to enter," Vaughn said.

The Citizen-Soldiers were flying in an Alabama Army National Guard UH-60 Black Hawk helicopter assigned to the 36th Combat Aviation Brigade with the Texas Army National Guard. The helicopter was returning to Camp Victory, Baghdad, after a site visit and flying in formation before the crash, NGB officials said.

A quick reaction force arrived at the crash site in three minutes, secured the area and reported no survivors, the American Forces Information Service reported. The lead helicopter landed after the crash to see if anyone could be saved, AFIS reported.

Through Jan. 19, 443 National Guard Citizen-Soldiers and Airmen died in the Global War on Terrorism. Almost 200,000 Army National Guard Citizen-Soldiers wear combat patches on their right sleeve designating service in Afghanistan or Iraq.

The crash remained under investigation Jan. 30.

-- Master Sgt. Bob Haskell and The Washington Post contributed to this report.