

The story of the death of Isaac Palomarez and his body's return to his family. A seven-part series.

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Reporter-Herald

Monday, May 12, 2008 - default Edition - Edition: (RH)- Page: 1-A

‘He didn’t make it back’

Family of Loveland soldier who died in Afghanistan says he was proud to serve

By Sarah Bultema

Reporter-Herald Staff Writer

On Sunday, Mother’s Day, Elma Palomarez used the strength she gained as a parent to cope with the death of her youngest son.

Just four days prior, Isaac Palomarez was killed while serving in Afghanistan.

“If you’re a mother you have to be strong,” said Elma, who sat next to a flowering garden in her west Loveland home. “The strength just comes from the experience, from what you have to do.”

Twenty-six-year-old Sgt. Isaac Palomarez was on his second tour of the Middle East, serving as an Army infantry soldier in the war-torn country’s Kapisa Province.

He was with his patrol Friday (Thursday in the United States) when they encountered an improvised explosive device and came under small-arms and rocket-propelled grenade fire, said the Department of Defense.

Isaac was killed.

Yet through the tragedy of his death, the fallen soldier’s parents know their son’s life was not taken in vain.

“Freedom doesn’t come free. He knew he was there for a purpose,” said his father, Candido

Palomarez.

“He was one of those that paid the price, and I think he did it proudly.”

Among the tears, laughter could occasionally be heard in home when Elma, Candido and their eldest son reflected on the family’s “baby.”

The youngest of four boys by nine years, Isaac grew up kind and quiet, his mother said.

His passions were football, skiing and hockey — but most of all Isaac loved to read. And military history was his specialty.

“Isaac would answer any military history question you might have had,” Elma said with a smile.

She and her husband credited this keen interest as part of Isaac’s motivation to join the Army.

In school, Isaac was an honor roll student at Immanuel Lutheran School and Loveland High School.

Following graduation, he attended Colorado State University for a year and a half. But later he had a change of interest and in 2004 signed with the Army.

While Isaac didn’t openly talk about his decision to join, Candido said a few conversations he had with his son pointed toward the attacks on Sept. 11, 2001, as a major reason why he did.

“He said ‘In 9/11 we were attacked on our own soil. Our response was necessary. It could not go unanswered,’” Candido said.

Isaac was deployed to Iraq in 2005 and returned to the States a year later.

When time came for him to leave for Afghanistan in March, Isaac’s parents said they weren’t too worried for his safety.

“He was never afraid, he was ready to go,” Elma said.

“He’d already gone to Iraq once and come back alive and well, so I figured it’s just another tour and he would come home again safe and sound.

“He didn’t make it back.”

Elma remembers the last time she spoke with her son.

Isaac had borrowed a cell phone for a quick call home, and was only able to get in a few minutes of conversation.

“He said hi and what’s happening right now,” she said. “And then he said ‘If I don’t get to talk to you again, happy Mother’s Day.’”

Elma was backing out of her driveway Thursday when she saw a uniformed figure in the rearview mirror. The soldier came to her window.

“Immediately I knew what had happened,” she said, letting a few tears escape.

Yet considering all that’s happened, Elma said she’s doing as well as she can.

“You have to. You have to have a clear brain and some sensibility to be able to make good decisions,” she said. “You go from there.”

Along with the family, Loveland is grieving the loss of one of its own.

Tim Aho, Isaac's fifth grade teacher, said he remembered the soldier more as an honorable man than an honor roll student.

Although he'd taught Isaac many years ago, Aho still remembered Isaac's constant smiling face.

"When you teach somebody, you just become connected to them for a lifetime," he said, pausing for tears.

"He truly is an honor to his family and his country and to anyone who knew him."

Isaac was the first Loveland soldier killed in Afghanistan.

Yet even before Isaac's death, his parents and family were praised by friends and members of the community for their son's commitment.

"They were proud of him because he was serving his country," Elma said.

Isaac, too, realized the importance of his work as a soldier.

Through studying military history, he understood the sacrifices that had come before him, as well as the sacrifice he might have to make to protect our country, Candido said. And it was a sacrifice he was willing to make.

"He wanted the community to know that the price is worth it," Elma said. "We have to keep our country free."

Isaac's body is in Maryland and is expected to arrive in Loveland by Thursday.

While the impact of what's really happened is still settling in, his parents said right now they're happy for the 26 wonderful years they had with their son.

"We were blessed to have him in the first place," Candido said.

"Freedom doesn't come free. He knew he was there for a purpose. He was one of those that paid the price, and I think he did it proudly."

Candido Palomarez, father of fallen Loveland soldier Isaac Palomarez

Reporter-Herald photos/CHRISTOPHER STARK

Candido and Elma Palomarez talk about their son, Isaac Palomarez, who was killed May 9 while fighting in Afghanistan. The two are proud of his Army service. "I'm sad and sorry that he was one of the ones that paid the price, but that's what he went there for," said Candido Palomarez. "We were blessed to have him. We had him for 26 long years."

Photos of Isaac Palomarez lay on the couch in his parents' Loveland home. The 26-year-old soldier was killed May 9 while fighting in Afghanistan. Palomarez graduated from Loveland High School in 2001.

Family readies for last farewell

Burial plans for Loveland soldier are still pending

By Sarah Bultema

Reporter-Herald Staff Writer

Burial plans for the Loveland soldier killed in Afghanistan are still pending, although the family has selected a church and burial home for the public service.

Sgt. Isaac Palomarez's family said Monday the 26-year-old's funeral will be early next week, with the service held at St. John the Evangelist Catholic Church, 1730 W. 12th St., and the burial at Resthaven Memory Gardens, 100 E. County Road 30.

Isaac's brother, Candido Palomarez III, was not sure when the body will be flown into Colorado, although he estimated Wednesday or Thursday of this week. He didn't know which airport, Denver International or Fort Collins-Loveland Municipal, would be the destination.

Palomarez, an Army infantry soldier, was with his patrol Friday (Thursday in the United States) when he encountered an improvised explosive device and came under small-arms and rocket-propelled grenade fire. Isaac was killed.

His brother said the community's support has been "very heartwarming" since hearing the news of his death.

Monday afternoon, baskets of food and bouquets of flowers were left on the doorstep of the family's west Loveland home.

The Palomarezes are setting up a memorial fund in honor of their son, which should be in place later this week.

Online Condolences

Share your thoughts and condolences at www.reporterherald.com/soldier

Remembering Isaac

Fallen soldier's friends recall life of special person

By Sarah Bultema

Reporter-Herald Staff Writer

Before Isaac Palomarez left for Afghanistan, his best friend had just one request.

“Make sure you drop me an e-mail every couple of months so I know nothing’s happened to you.”

Brett Sandford choked with tears remembering one of the last things he said to Palomarez during the Army sergeant’s visit home to Loveland in December.

“I was concerned, but I never really thought anything was going to happen.”

On Friday, Sandford got a call that Palomarez had been killed while serving in the war-torn country.

“Nothing made sense,” Sandford remembered. “Everything lost sense of meaning.”

Palomarez, an infantry soldier, was with his patrol Friday (Thursday in the United States) when he encountered an improvised explosive device and came under small-arms and rocket-propelled grenade fire, says the Department of Defense.

Since learning of Palomarez’s death, many of the 26-year-old’s closest friends are holding on to their memories of him to try to begin living their lives without him.

Chris Griess, who graduated with Palomarez from Loveland High School in 2001, had gone to a Colorado Avalanche hockey game with him just a few months ago during the soldier’s last visit home.

Along with Sandford and Chip Gray, the decade-long friends enjoyed watching Palomarez’s favorite team win in overtime.

“He was really fun to hang out with,” Griess said. “He was a really straightforward guy. Really smart and funny.”

Hanging out and doing “guy things,” like playing video games or watching sports on TV, were favorite pastimes for Palomarez, Sandford said.

After his first tour of Iraq, the soldier and Sandford were able to pick up right where they’d left off.

“We just tried to spend some time having a good time,” he said.

Along with those who knew him until the end, friends from years before are shocked, grieving and holding onto memories of Palomarez, too.

Lexy Olsen, who dated Palomarez before he joined the Army, hadn’t talked with him since a phone call two years ago.

But despite the time passed, she remembered the handsome man to whom she was “attached at the hip” for months.

“He was just a wonderful, wonderful, wonderful person,” she said. “He would do anything for anybody.”

In her list of memories of him, the car ride when Palomarez broke the news he was joining the Army stands out.

“I was kind of shocked, but not surprised,” she said.

“He knew why he was going and he knew what could or could not happen. And he wanted to go and fight for his country.”

Monday night, Sandford, Olsen and other friends of Palomarez met to remember their friend and watch a movie.

Getting together and talking about Palomarez has been helping them get through the loss.

“Trying to talk to people and vocalize it helps,” Sandford said.

And sometimes, when he’s alone, Sandford even finds himself talking to Palomarez.

“I’m sure he’s getting a kick out of it, watching me trying to figure out what I’m doing.”

While they’re all grieving, Sandford said, Palomarez wouldn’t want his friends to mope around too long.

“He was never one to really want people to feel bad for him,” he said.

Even though he’s gone, Olsen said there are a few things she’ll never forget about her friend:

“His love for his family and friends. The good times that we all shared together. His love for hockey.

“And his smile.”

Palomarez Funeral Service

The funeral service for the Loveland soldier killed in Afghanistan will be held 10 a.m. Monday at St. John the Evangelist Catholic Church, 1730 W. 12th St.

Following the service, 26-year-old Sgt. Isaac Palomarez will be buried with full military honors at Resthaven Memory Gardens, 8426 S. U.S. 287, about noon.

Police said they have been asked to assist with traffic control around the procession route, but that route had not been determined as of Tuesday.

The family has established a memorial fund in their son’s name. Contributions can be sent to the Isaac Palomarez Memorial Fund, c/o Resthaven Funeral Home and Memory Garden, 8426 S. U.S. 287, Fort Collins, CO 80525.

Brett Sandford talks about his best friend, Isaac Palomarez, during an interview at his Fort Collins home. Lexy Olsen, in background with her 4-month-old son Blaise, dated Palomarez before he joined the Army. Sandford will meet Palomarez one last time when his body arrives at the airport, a task he performed often when his friend returned home for leave.

Reporter-Herald

Thursday, May 15, 2008 - default Edition - Edition: (RH)- Page: 2-A

United by SERVICE

Veterans form familial bond through patriotic duty

By Sarah Bultema

Reporter-Herald Staff Writer

On Wednesday morning, Loveland said goodbye to a 90-year-old veteran who served his country by sea more than 65 years ago.

This Monday, the community will say farewell to a 26-year-old soldier who gave the ultimate sacrifice just one week ago.

While the two men served in different branches of the military, in different wars and in different centuries, they both served to protect the same country.

And local veterans mourn them both as fallen members of their family.

“A veteran is a veteran,” said Tony DuMosch, American Legion District 4 commander. “And anytime we lose one, we lose a brother or a sister.

“This is a sad, sad seven days in Loveland.”

The Loveland Veterans Club was filled with family members and friends Wednesday to honor one of the fallen warriors, Reuben Krening.

The Navy veteran had been laid to rest earlier that morning at Loveland Burial Park in a farewell to one of the last Pearl Harbor survivors in Loveland.

“With the passing of Reuben, we have lost a significant piece of living history here in Loveland,” DuMosch said.

Krening served in the Navy during World War II, witnessing the surprise attack in Hawaii firsthand.

After returning home to Loveland, the lifelong resident joined the American Legion, a veterans club, where he was a member for 60 years.

Krening even helped move the club’s building, part of a former prisoner of war camp, to its Loveland location from Windsor decades ago.

“He was a very honorable, knowledgeable and patriotic man,” said Harry Weber, a Vietnam veteran who attended the service.

While Krening lived to the ripe age of 90, a second veteran’s burial is scheduled for a soldier taken in his youth.

Loveland's Isaac Palomarez was killed Friday in Afghanistan when his patrol encountered an improvised explosive device and came under small-arms and rocket-propelled grenade fire, according to the Department of Defense.

While Weber had never met Palomarez, he grieved for the young man as a "member of the family."

However, he noted, veterans don't believe that his sacrifice was made without purpose.

"Since our forefathers, (soldiers) have given their all to see that we're free," Weber said.

"Isaac was doing the same thing. ... I could not be prouder."

Retired Army chaplain James Vincent, who served in the Korean War and officiated at Krening's service, agreed.

"It's sad for us, but we don't think he died in vain," he said.

In this time of loss, Vincent suggested that local veterans come together and talk about everything that's happened, both the recent losses and their own experiences with war.

Monday, at Palomarez's funeral procession, might be a good place to start.

DuMosch is coordinating with local military organizations to get as many veterans curbside as possible, ideally in uniform.

It's a gesture he hopes will show the Palomarez family support in their time of sorrow.

"When you look around and see the pride and faith and belief in our country," he said, "it puts a weight in the heart and lump in the throat of nothing but pride."

Reporter-Herald graphic/KATE WYMAN

Procession route announced

A funeral procession for Sgt. Isaac Palomarez of Loveland, the Army soldier killed in Afghanistan, will travel the streets of Loveland on Monday following the 10 a.m. Mass at St. John the Evangelist Catholic Church, 1730 W. 12th St. The service is open to the public.

Starting about 11:20 a.m., the procession will start near Taft Avenue and West Eisenhower Boulevard, travel north on Taft to 29th Street, east on 29th to U.S. 287 and north on U.S. 287 to Resthaven Memory Gardens north of Loveland.

The family has requested that community members with American flags line the procession route.

Reporter-Herald photos/CHRISTOPHER STARK

Chaplain James Vincent salutes the flag and the remains of Reuben Krening on Wednesday morning as friends and family members mourn the loss of the Pearl Harbor survivor at Loveland Burial Park. Krening was believed to be one of Loveland's last survivors of Pearl Harbor.

A well-wisher holds the hand of Evangeline Krening on Wednesday after the service for her husband, Pearl Harbor survivor Reuben Krening, at Loveland Burial Park.

Chaplain James Vincent talks about the passing of veterans Wednesday in the Associated

Veterans Club after the service he performed for friend Reuben Krening, a Navy veteran who witnessed the bombing of Pearl Harbor.

Reporter-Herald/CHRISTOPHER STARK

Reporter-Herald

Friday, May 16, 2008 - default Edition - Edition: (RH)- Page: 1-A

Isaac's home

Family mourns Loveland soldier killed in Afghanistan

By Sarah Bultema • Reporter-Herald Staff Writer

A soldier's mother let out a few deep, painful sobs as she rested her head and hands on the flag-draped casket in front of her. ¶ Sgt. Isaac Palomarez, her son, her baby, was back home in Loveland. ¶ But this wasn't the way she'd intended.

Just one week ago, Isaac, an Army infantryman, was killed in combat while serving in Afghanistan.

Early Thursday, his body was flown back to Loveland.

Isaac's parents waited near the runway, between saluting police officers and soldiers, to welcome their son's return one last time.

Few words were spoken.

Instead, the dialogue surrounding the fallen soldier's return was written in marching footsteps and mournful cries.

Their morning started early, before 7 a.m., but those close to Isaac still arrived well ahead of schedule.

Elma and Candido Palomarez, Isaac's parents, three of the 26-year-old's best friends and an Army casualty assistance officer met at Resthaven Funeral Home before Isaac's arrival at the Fort Collins-Loveland Municipal Airport.

No one spoke above a whisper, and the room fell silent each time Elma let out a cry.

Elma and Candido, who'd stood strong and brave since hearing the news, were worn. But holding onto each other, arm in arm, they tried their best to keep their composure.

Across the room, Brett Sandford tossed Chris Griess and Chip Gray packets of tissue like footballs, preparing for the tears to come.

Meanwhile, Lt. Geoff Terman, the casualty assistance officer assigned to help the Palomarezes, placed a phone call to check on the status of the flight.

“Are you in place?” he asked. “Roger that.”

He hung up the phone and readied the family to leave. Soon, they filed into a limousine and took back roads to the airport.

This is the first casualty assistance Terman has been assigned.

“It’s an important job,” he said during the drive. “And it’s a big responsibility.”

The group arrived at the airport and was greeted by dozens of Loveland police officers and Army Honor Guard soldiers.

Awaiting the plane, those in uniform lined up on ramp space near the runway.

Inside the terminal, Elma anxiously gazed out a windowed door toward the sky.

“I’m OK,” she assured her worried husband.

Griess and Gray stood silently, hands crossed in front of them, staring straight ahead.

Sandford sat, his head bowed.

Last December, when Isaac came home on break, Sandford was the one to pick him up from the airport — an unspoken tradition the two friends always followed.

They’d driven home chatting about movies and sports. The best friends didn’t need to spend any conversation catching up, Sandford said. They stayed in touch even when Isaac was overseas.

So on Thursday, it was only fitting that Sandford was there to greet his friend one more time, he said.

After a prayer by the Rev. Joseph Hartmann, news arrived that the aircraft was getting closer.

Brad Bishop, Resthaven’s funeral director, was the first to spot the plane.

“That’s him,” he said, one hand on Elma’s back and the other pointing toward the sky.

Moments later, Elma and Candido walked out of the terminal and into the sun.

To their left stood Loveland police officers. To their right, Army Honor Guard members.

And soon, in the center of them all, a white charter airplane.

As its jet engines hummed to a stop, the uniformed officers gave proud and sturdy salutes.

The next few minutes were completely silent. All that could be heard was the gust of a breeze, which blew on the backs of the Palomarezes toward the plane — toward their son.

Slowly, a side cargo door wheezed open. Two soldiers hopped to the ground. They took out a platform and raised it to the level of the open door.

The red and white stripes of an American flag were the first sign of Isaac. They draped a silver casket, which was gently taken out of the plane and to the ground.

Elma sobbed. Candido kissed her head.

Seven honor guards marched the casket to a waiting hearse, and Isaac’s parents walked toward their son.

They each placed a hand on the flag, and Elma seemed to go limp in the arms of her husband.

It was a powerful sight for all in attendance, even those surrounded by loss every day.

“I’ve never cried at a funeral,” said Resthaven’s Andy Feagler, who drove the hearse. Today, he wiped tears away.

On the drive back to the funeral home, friends and family members rode behind the hearse.

Police cars escorted the vehicles, lights blazing the whole way. Motorcycle police officers sped ahead to block traffic as the procession drove past.

Inside the limousine, those closest to Isaac sat in complete silence.

A few of the only words spoken were whispered from Elma to Candido.

“I miss his smile,” she said softly.

Back at Resthaven, the casket was taken into a sanctuary and placed by a crucifix, in between two burning candles.

Approaching the casket, Elma and Candido slowly bent to their knees in front of their son.

Again, each placed one hand on the flag. Soon, Elma sank her head down as well. Together they cried and they prayed.

Later, Elma was handed a rosary Isaac had on him when he died. She also was presented his dog tags and medals he earned while serving.

But before the medals and memorabilia, Isaac’s parents joined their son’s three best friends in a group hug.

While embraced, Candido had just one request.

“Never forget him,” he said.

“Never,” was the unanimous reply.

MORE PHOTOS: Visit [www .reporterherald.com/soldier](http://www.reporterherald.com/soldier).

Funeral procession route

A funeral procession for Sgt. Isaac Palomarez will travel the streets of Loveland on Monday following the 10 a.m. Mass at St. John the Evangelist Catholic Church, 1730 W. 12th St. The service is open to the public.

Starting about 11:20 a.m., the procession will start near Taft Avenue and West Eisenhower Boulevard, travel north on Taft to 29th Street, east on 29th to U.S. 287 and north on U.S. 287 to Resthaven Memory Gardens north of Loveland.

The family has requested that community members with American flags line the procession route.

Reporter-Herald photos/CHRISTOPHER STARK

Elma and Candido Palomarez kneel before the coffin of their son, Sgt. Isaac Palomarez, Thursday at Resthaven Funeral Home. Palomarez was 26 when he died while fighting in Afghanistan on May 9. His body was flown to the Fort Collins-Loveland Municipal Airport, where he was given full military honors.

Reporter-Herald photos/CHRISTOPHER STARK

Lt. Geoff Terman walks past the hearse that holds the body of Sgt. Isaac Palomarez Thursday at the Fort Collins-Loveland Municipal Airport. Terman is the casualty assistance officer who takes care of the soldier's family.

Loveland Fire and Rescue personnel salute the remains of Sgt. Isaac Palomarez on Thursday at the airport.

Reporter-Herald graphic/KATE WYMAN

From left, Chris Greiss, Brett Sandford and Chip Gray await the arrival of the remains of their longtime friend, Sgt. Isaac Palomarez. The three attended Loveland High School together.

Below, Loveland Fire and Rescue personnel salute the remains of Sgt. Isaac Palomarez on Thursday at Fort Collins-Loveland Airport.

Elma and Candido Palomarez await the arrival of their son, Isaac, next to Casualty Assistance Officer Lt. Geoff Terman at the airport.

Reporter-Herald

Monday, May 19, 2008 - default Edition - Edition: (RH)- Page: 2-A

By his side

Friends and family of fallen Loveland soldier gather to recite rosary, remember Sgt. Palomarez

By Sarah Bultema

Reporter-Herald Staff Writer

Surrounded by their closest friends and family members Sunday, Isaac Palomarez's mother, father and three brothers held on to each other and wept by the fallen soldier's casket.

The family was together again for the first time since their youngest sibling and son was killed while serving in Afghanistan.

As they embraced, one of the brothers' hands was always holding on to the American flag-draped casket. Even in death, Isaac was still part of the family.

Those closest to the Army infantryman met at St. John the Evangelist Catholic Church Sunday evening at a private service to recite a rosary and pay their respects.

Nieces, nephews, neighbors, aunts, uncles and lifelong friends were waiting outside the church when the casket was taken out of the hearse and into the sanctuary.

Elma Palomarez, Isaac's mother, held on to her husband and let out mournful cries, just as she had when her son's body was first taken off the plane in Loveland.

But this time, the police and soldiers who had surrounded the parents were replaced with about 75 of those dearest to them — all there to support the family in their grief.

Clark Roman was one of them.

The 26-year-old was born only 10 days after Isaac, and the two grew up together to become lifelong friends.

"We were brothers," Roman said.

His mother, Judy Willett, had met Elma in the hospital the day Isaac was born.

Although they didn't know it at the time, they were already neighbors, and the two boys were playmates from the beginning.

"They were friends before they knew they were friends," Willett said.

Even as adults and separated by a few states, Isaac and Roman stayed in touch.

"He was always there for me," Roman remembered.

And Sunday, Roman was there for Isaac one last time.

Inside the church, mourners young and old silently wept as two Knights of Columbus Honor Guards stood tall, sword saluting, on either side of the casket.

Soon, Rev. Joseph Hartmann led the group in a rosary.

"Hail Mary, full of grace, the Lord is with thee," echoed throughout the stained glass and wood sanctuary.

Isaac's parents sat with their sons and surrounded by nieces and nephews. Kneeling in the pew, they traced the rosary beads in their hands.

Following the prayers, Isaac's parents and siblings approached the casket resting at the center of attention.

To the left was a flower-framed black and white photograph of the soldier, saluting proudly at the crowd before him.

The Palomarezes each rested a hand on the casket. Candido, Isaac's father, and Elma bent down to give a kiss. Isaac's brothers embraced hands and arms, but always left one hand on their brother.

The family shared a long hug together and returned to their pew.

One by one, friends and family members walked to the casket to pay their respects.

And one by one, they embraced the Palomarezes with their love and condolences.

"I'm so sorry," was heard again and again before each hug, sob and hearty pat on the back.

Isaac's nieces and nephews sat back and cried together as they watched each person give their respects.

When it was Isaac's lifelong friend Roman's turn to share his sorrow, Elma grabbed onto the

young man extra tight.

Together, they cried in an embrace, grieving the child they'd watched grow into a man.

Funeral procession

A funeral procession for Sgt. Isaac Palomarez will travel the streets of Loveland today following the 10 a.m. Mass at St. John the Evangelist Catholic Church, 1730 W. 12th St. The service is open to the public.

Starting about 11:20 a.m., the procession will start near Taft Avenue and West Eisenhower Boulevard, travel north on Taft to 29th Street, east on 29th to U.S. 287 and north on U.S. 287 to Resthaven Memory Gardens north of Loveland.

The family has requested that community members with American flags line the procession route.

Brothers, from left, Candido Palomarez III, Rene and Omar and their parents, Elma and Candido Palomarez, visit the casket of the youngest Palomarez son, Sgt. Isaac Palomarez, Sunday following the recitation of the rosary at St. John the Evangelist Catholic Church.

Meg Nitchen prays the rosary in support of the family of Isaac Palomarez Sunday at St. John the Evangelist Catholic Church.

Reporter-Herald

Tuesday, May 20, 2008 - default Edition - Edition: (RH)- Page: 1-A

Laid to rest

Family and friends say goodbye to Sgt. Palomarez

By Sarah Bultema • Reporter-Herald Staff Writer

In a police-led procession, the Palomarez family drove toward the cemetery behind a hearse carrying their youngest son and sibling. It was time to say goodbye to Sgt. Isaac Palomarez, Loveland's fallen soldier. But on Monday the family did not mourn alone.

Thousands of community members lined the procession route, waving red, white and blue in support of the city's hero.

Some saluted, some cried, some put one hand over their heart. But almost everyone lining the streets held an American flag proudly toward the sky.

Isaac, who was killed 11 days ago while serving in Afghanistan, was laid to rest at Resthaven Memory Gardens north of Loveland that Monday afternoon.

For the family, it was a day to honor and remember the 26-year-old soldier.

Before the morning's church service, the Palomarezes met at Resthaven Funeral Home to pay their respects privately one last time.

Elma Palomarez, Isaac's mother, immediately rested her head on the flag-draped casket, just as she had many times before in the past few days.

She wept and cried "I love you" as her husband, Candido Palomarez, rubbed her back.

In pairs of twos and threes, Isaac's brothers, sisters-in-law, nieces, nephews and best friends followed the parents, kneeling to pay their respect at the casket.

Soon, six motorcycle police officers marched into the sanctuary to begin the day's ceremonies.

They put the casket in the hearse, walking it past a saluting Candido, and led the procession to St. John the Evangelist.

The family arrived to the church through a line of American flags held tall but stationary by the Patriot Guards.

Church bells dinged just as the flag-draped casket was removed from the hearse. Isaac's four best friends and three brothers carried him inside.

Hundreds of family members, friends, servicemen and -women and mourners soon packed the church.

As the immediate family entered, the youngest Palomarezes waved American flags down all the way down the aisle.

The Rev. Joseph Hartmann began the service.

"Isaac lives in our hearts," he said. "Even the emptiness of death cannot take that away."

Describing Isaac as a quiet, wonderful and selfless man, Hartmann commemorated the soldier who put the greater good of the community and country above his own life.

"He died for what he believed in," he said. "He will always be a hero to us."

Following prayers, songs and communion, Isaac's best friend and two of his brothers each took the microphone to read eulogies.

"He was supposed to be the best man at my wedding, and me at his. There are a million unrealized dreams and accomplishments left unfinished," said Brett Sandford, Isaac's best friend.

But whenever he starts to feel down about the fact he'll never see his best friend again, he said, Sandford finds comfort in knowing that as long as Isaac is remembered, "he is not dead, he has just left his body."

"Although he no longer walks amongst us, he will forever be at our sides."

Elma and Candido stayed strong throughout the service. There were tears, but also laughter, especially when hearing memories shared by those who loved their son most.

At the end of the service, drums, trumpets and a piano played "Battle Hymn of the Republic" and the family solemnly followed the casket out of the church.

In the bright light of the day, a sea of red, white and blue lined the driveway of the church as

children held American flags.

Along the entire drive to the cemetery, not a block went by that didn't have a cluster of patriotic supporters.

Families, classes, children and seniors waved flags, signs and anything red, white and blue as the police-led procession drove through the streets of Loveland.

Construction workers paused their jobs for brief moments to salute the limousines driving by. Businesses covered their own signs with American flags.

People held hand-drawn posters that held messages like "Thank you for our freedom" and "Sgt. Palomarez in my hero."

Arriving at the cemetery, the hearse passed under a giant American flag hung above the entrance between two firetruck ladders.

The procession weaved through the cemetery until the family's limousine was centered near the grave site.

The Palomarezes were led to Isaac's final resting place through a path of our country's flags held by the Patriot Guard.

As the family moved closer to the grave, the Patriot Guards closed around them, surrounding the family in a protective circle.

Hundreds stood silently as the casket was slowly walked toward the grave. Flapping flags and distant Army commands were all that could be heard.

Isaac was laid to rest in front of his parents and brothers.

Two of the soldier's final awards were presented to his family: the Purple Heart and Bronze Star.

A few last prayers were read. Elma stared at the casket. Candido ran his finger over the medals.

Soon, the flag that had draped the casket was taken to the side by Army Honor Guards.

They held it taut as three ear-piercing shots were fired.

"Amazing Grace" began to play as the soldiers started folding the flag. The white stars and blue were soon all that could be seen of the flag.

Major Gen. Guy Swan slowly walked the folded flag to Isaac's parents. He knelt in front of them and placed it in their hands.

They cradled it in their laps, all four hands patting and rubbing the symbol of their son and country.

After a final prayer, a bagpiper performed "Amazing Grace" a second time.

Elma rested her head on her husband's. For the first time Monday afternoon, she let go. Together, head to head, the parents wept.

When it was time to leave her son, the soldier's mother placed her hand on the casket one last time.

"Goodbye," was all she said.

ONLINE: To submit your thoughts and condolences and see what others are saying, go to

www.reporterherald.com/soldier.

‘He will always be a hero to us’

— The Rev. Joseph Hartmann

Jenny Sparks

Sgt. Isaac Palomarez’s parents Candido and Elma Palomarez comfort each other as they hold the flag that draped his casket Monday during his burial service at Resthaven Memory Gardens in Loveland.

Jenny Sparks

Members of the Army Honor Guard carry the casket holding Sgt. Isaac Palomarez into Resthaven Memory Gardens for the soldier’s burial service.

Christopher Stark

Members of the Army Honor Guard pay their respects to Sgt. Palomarez.

The body of Sgt. Isaac Palomarez rests in the sanctuary of St. John the Evangelist Church Monday as the funeral mass commences.

Honor Guard members pay their respects to Sgt. Isaac Palomarez at St. John the Evangelist Church.

Nate Bettmann holds the crucifix that rested atop the casket during the funeral for Sgt. Isaac Palomarez before it is presented to the family at Resthaven Funeral Home and Memory Gardens.

Candido and Elma Palomarez listen to the Rev. Joseph Hartmann on Monday during the funeral for their son, Sgt. Isaac Palomarez, at St. John the Evangelist Church. Palomarez was killed while serving in Afghanistan on May 9.

People line 29th Street between Taft Avenue and U.S. 287 holding flags and showing their respect to the family of Sgt. Isaac Palomarez during the funeral procession from St. John the Evangelist Catholic Church to Resthaven Memory Gardens.

Reporter-Herald/BRANDON IWAMOTO