

Chapter 3

Local Newspaper Articles

Corning, California Area

Corning Observer, July 1, 1996

Saudi terrorist bomb kills local airman

Airman 1st Class Joshua Woody was scheduled to leave days later

By MICHAEL GRIFFIN – Editor

Three days before former Corning resident Joshua Woody would have left his post last week at a U.S. military base in Dhahran, Saudi Arabia, a terrorist bomb blast smothered his young life.

Late Tuesday evening a truck bomb exploded outside the military base moments after the bombers were seen running toward a car and speeding away. Although frantic attempts to evacuate the, nearby buildings began, U.S. troops did not have enough time to escape. Airman 1st Class Joshua Edward Woody was one of 19 Americans killed in the blast, while hundreds more were injured.

Josh, a member of the 1994 class of Corning Union High School and a football standout, had been stationed in Dhahran for a few months. Josh was a member of a ground crew supporting aircraft to keep the Saudi airspace clear. He was assigned to the 33rd Fighter Wing out of Eglin Air Force Base, Fla.

“Everybody in his life was a friend, his smile and his sense of humor,” said family spokesman Michael Flaherty. “He touched everybody he ever met. One of his buddies in the military characterized him by saying if he ran into someone he didn’t know at the mall, they’d part friends.”

Although his final actions were not known, Josh had reportedly been off-duty with a group of servicemen somewhere in the building before the bomb exploded, Flaherty said. Josh lived on the eighth floor, the top floor on the side that was destroyed by the bomb blast.

Earlier this year, Josh was married on Feb. 21 to the former Dawn Riniker. They had met while he was stationed in Oklahoma for advanced training. His last family contact was on his wedding day. In addition to his wife, Dawn of Fort Walton Beach, Fla., Josh is survived by his mother and step father Bernadine and George Beekman of Corning; father and step-mother John and Carol Woody, of Rancho Tehama; a brother, Timothy Woody of Corning; a sister, Seaman Jonica Woody, who is assigned to U.S.S. Detroit; a sister, Tracy Woody of Willows; a step brother, John Woody, of Illinois; in-laws, Mr. and Mrs. Gerald P. Riniker of Claremore, Okla.; and numerous family members.

In lieu of flowers, the family has requested any contributions be made to the Josh Woody Memorial Fund at Corning Union High School. At a later date, a memorial service will be held at the high school.

Last Wednesday, three officers from Beale Air Force Base visited both his parents in Corning and Rancho Tehama to report he was missing in action after the bomb blast in Dhahran. On Friday, his family received confirmation from military officials he was among the dead.

On Saturday, Josh's parents and siblings were flown to Eglin Air Force Base, Fla., to attend the memorial services yesterday for the families of the Americans killed. Families of the victims also met privately with President Bill Clinton.

Locally, Josh was active in school activities and known for his "monkey faces." At Corning Union High School, Josh was co-captain of his high school football team and a member of the wrestling team, Flaherty said. He played tight-end, and arrangements are being made to retire his #88 jersey at the high school, Flaherty said. The Cardinals first football game this fall will be dedicated in Josh's memory. Josh was honored by being selected to play in the summer Lion's All-Star Football Game after he graduated from high school.



Joshua and Dawn Woody on their wedding day, Feb. 21, 1996



Joshua makes a monkey face beside his mother, Bernadine Beekman, outside a church in Claremore, Okla., on his wedding day.



Joshua Woody

Josh worked at McDonalds in Corning and Willows.

“Josh was something else. Any one who knew him has stories about him,” Flaherty said.

Bob Hall teaches American government and physical education at CUHS and is the varsity football coach. “I heard Wednesday night Josh was unaccounted for,” Hall said. “He was just a great kid, a kid that was just a great role model for others to follow. Looked upon by the faculty, community and peers as a real great citizen.”

Hall described Josh as a “hard worker,” playing four years on football team, three on wrestling.

“It’s just a real tragedy for a young life to be lost in this manner,” Hall said. “Josh will always be remembered in our program as the kid who was truly the team player, relentless in whatever he did. Just a great kid on campus. Real positive, always smiling.”

Before graduating from CUHS, he had signed up delayed entry into the U.S. Air Force.

(Staff Writer Adam Jones contributed to this report.)



Corning Observer, July 1, 1996

A good Corning youth will be remembered

By MICHAEL FLAHERTY

Special to the Corning Observer

Shortly after noon this past Wednesday, I received a call from my long-time friend George Beekman. “Mike, we have reason to believe Josh was in the dorm where the explosion occurred in Saudi Arabia.”

Closing my eyes, I recalled the time Josh wandered into the living room eating a peach. His mom asked what he had; he grinned at her and casually said “one of those fuzzy things.”

Josh, the kid with a smile on his face and a witty sense of humor.

Tuesday afternoon, I heard about the explosion while listening to the radio. The thought never entered my mind that I might know anyone affected by the terrorist bombing. George called again about 6:30.

“The Air Force just left. Josh’s whereabouts are unknown; he’s missing in action!” Josh is Airman 1st Class Joshua Edward Woody, son of Bernie Beekman and John Woody, graduate of Corning Union High School, a superb athlete and a friend of everyone he ever met.

A few minutes later I was in George’s living room reading a letter, addressed to Mrs. Bernadine Beekman, from Brigadier General Susan Pamerleau. “It is with deep personal concern that I officially inform you that the duty status and whereabouts of your son has been unknown since 25 June 1996.”

The letter continued, “He has been unaccounted for since the suspected terrorist bombing at Dhahran Air Base, Saudi Arabia.” Josh’s mother Bernie had just received the letter from members of an Air Force Notification team. The team left the Beekman residence for Rancho Tehama to give the same message to Josh’s father and stepmother, John and Carol Woody.

Since then I’ve spent hours on the phone with the Air Force, Josh’s family members, his friends and even the airlines. My role became that of the always anonymous “family friend,” who speaks for the family to protect their privacy at such a difficult time.

From conversations with Josh’s brother, sisters, stepbrother, military buddies, local friends and classmates, relatives, friends of the family and others I now realize why everyone has such a wonderful image of Josh. “He touched everyone he ever met in a way that they parted friends,” said Airman 1st Class Joel Hodges, Josh’s boot camp buddy who became one of Josh and his wife Dawn’s closest military friends. Joel added, “he hated no one and loved everybody.” Everyone I’ve talked with agrees the death of Josh was tragic and senseless. Perhaps the only good to emerge, however, is that Josh Woody will be forever a role model for the Corning High student body and a hero to the community of Corning.

The legacy of Joshua Edward Woody, a good kid from Corning, will exist forever.

Good bye, Josh. We’ll all miss you.

Corning Observer

July 2, 1996

Joshua Edward Woody

Airman First Class

Corning, CA - Airman First Class Joshua Edward Woody, U.S. Air Force, age 20, passed away Tuesday, June 25, 1996, in Saudi Arabia.



Joshua was born in San Jose, California. He was a member of the 33rd Fighter Wing, 58th Squadron, and a former Lyons Club All Star football team member.

Survivors include his wife, Dawn Woody of Fort Walton Beach, FL; mother and stepfather, Bernadine and George Beekman of Corning, CA; father and stepmother, John and Carol Woody of Corning, CA; brothers Timothy Woody of Corning, CA and John Edward Woody, Jr. of Chicago, IL; sisters, Tracy Marie Woody of Willows, CA, Fireman Jonica Lynn Woody of the USS Detroit, and Cindy Lee Woody of Chicago, IL.

Funeral services will be conducted at 10 a.m. Friday, July 5, at Our Lady of Victory Catholic Church in Crestview, FL with Father Brian Ryan officiating. Burial will follow at 1:30 p.m. in Barrancas National Cemetery in Pensacola, FL, with full military honors.

The family will receive friends at the funeral home from 6 to 9 p.m. Tuesday, July 4th.

Whitehurst Funeral Home, Crestview, FL, is in charge of arrangements.

Record Searchlight, July 6, 1996

Airman buried beside friend

The family of Joshua Woody of Corning, a victim of the bomb blast at a U.S. base in Saudi Arabia, honored his wish to be buried with his best friend.

By Bill Kaczor
The Associated Press



AP Photo

An Air Force honor guard carries the caskets of Joshua Woody and Joseph Rimkus at a cemetery in Pensacola, Fla., on Friday

PENSACOLA, Fla. — They grew up a continent apart, but they shared common values and became best friends during Air Force basic training.

Joshua Woody of Corning and Joseph E. Rimkus of Crestview, Fla., were buried together Friday, victims of a terrorist truck bombing in Dhahran, Saudi Arabia, that killed 17 other airmen.

“They were close, worked and lived together, just did everything together,” said Rimkus’ father, Joseph J. Rimkus. “They were just both really good guys. They both loved life. They loved sports and kids, music, family.”

Both were high school athletes from rural towns. They served together in the 33rd Fighter Wing at nearby Eglin Air Force Base and died together in the room they shared in Dhahran.

With a recording of the song “I’m Proud to be an American” playing in the background, an Air Force honor guard carried two flag-draped coffins into Our Lady of Victory Roman Catholic Church in Crestview, 50 miles northeast of Pensacola.

“We want to honor them most especially as friends, as best friends ... those who can share their lives and, in a very painful way for us, share their deaths,” said the Rev. Bryan Ryan, the church’s pastor.

They had a closeness peculiar to the military, said the gray-bearded priest, a retired Navy chaplain.

“It doesn’t happen anywhere else, especially with men. Men, you know, are prone not to admit those things because it’s not macho,” Ryan said. “In the military you kind of are allowed to say ‘I have a best friend.’”

Hours later they were laid rest, side-by-side, at Barrancas National Cemetery on the grounds of Pensacola Naval Air Station. There they joined soldiers, sailors and airmen who served in conflict and peace dating back from before the Civil War through the Persian Gulf War and now Middle East terrorism.

A lone bagpiper played a mournful tune as the two caskets were removed from identical white hearses.

The honor guard, in dress blue uniforms with silver braid, played taps and fired three rifle volleys.

U.S. flags were presented to the dead airmen’s parents and to Woody’s wife, Dawn Riniker Woody. They married less than five months ago, just weeks before he departed for Saudi Arabia.

Woody, the son of Bernadine Beekman of Corning and John Woody of Rancho Tehama, was a high school football star and also competed in wrestling.

Rimkus, who ran cross-country in high school, was from an, Air Force family. His father, a retired master sergeant, lives in Kirkwood, Mo., and his mother, Bridget Brooks, resides in Niceville near Eglin.

When Hurricane Opal damaged his mother’s home last year Rimkus and Woody worked together to patch the roof.

After the burial, members of the two families embraced each other. Woody’s family honored his wish to be buried with his friend:

“They never let anything get to them, tried their best to be happy and keep everybody happy around them,” said the elder Rimkus.

Corning will hold memorial tomorrow for Joshua Woody



Corning will celebrate the life of fallen airman Joshua Woody tomorrow night.

The memorial service will be held in the Corning Union High School gymnasium at 8 p.m.

Woody, a U.S. Airman 1st Class, was killed by a terrorist truck bomb blast June 25 while stationed at a U.S. military base in Dhahran, Saudi Arabia.

A member of the class of 1994 at Corning Union High School, he was active in school activities. Woody was a co-captain and standout on the football team and competed on the wrestling team.



First tree planted in memorial grove

A redwood tree was dedicated in memory of U.S. Airman 1st Class Joshua Woody and planted at Yost Park yesterday. In the future, other redwood trees will be planted to create a memorial grove on the south side of the baseball field.

Woody was killed along with 18 other U.S. airmen in the June 25th 'terrorist bomb explosion while stationed at a U.S. military base in Dhahran, Saudi Arabia.

The tree was donated by Marjorie Yost-Conserve. Yost Park is named after her late husband, Roger Yost, who donated the parcel of land so local children would have a ball field to play in.

“I thought about this boy,” Yost said of Woody. “The Yost children are very proud of this park. He (Roger) did work so hard on this.” Woody’s parents, Bernie and George Beekman attended the dedication.

“I’m really appreciative for the community and all the support shown — from the memorial fund at the high school to the co-ed baseball tournament to the dedication of this tree,” said George Beekman. “The community’s been wonderful.”

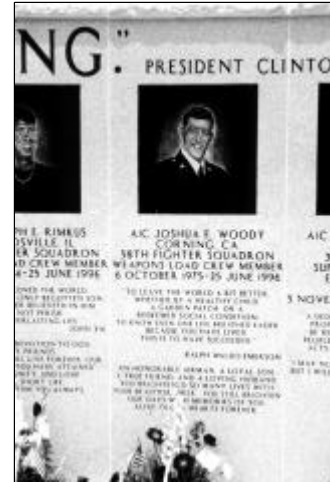
This is the start of a future redwood memorial grove, said Corning Public Works Superintendent Tom Russ. Future trees will be planted six feet apart.



MICHAEL GRIFFIN Corning Observer

Marjorie Yost-Conserve shovels dirt around the tree as (l. to r.) Stanley Jones, Jean Jones, Bernie Beekman, George Beekman, Councilman Rex Roush and Mayor Gary Strack look on.

Memorials honor Woody



Tomorrow marks the tragic second anniversary of Airman 1st Class Joshua Woody death, when he and 18 others were killed in the bombing of Khobar Towers in Dhahran, Saudi Arabia.

Last June 25, the memory of Woody and 11 others from the 33rd Fighter Wing were honored with a memorial wall (above, and at right) at Eglin Air Force Base, Fort Walton Beach, Fla. The project was completed through \$200,000 in donations and volunteer efforts from the fallen dozens' friends at the base where they were stationed.

Two months ago, Woody's name was dedicated to a corridor in a new building, Mathus Hall at Shepard Air Force Base, Wichita Falls, Texas. Woody graduated from tech school there. Another corridor was dedicated to Joseph Rimkus, who Woody met there and was his roommate in Saudi Arabia. Both are buried beside one another in Florida.

Photos special to the Observer