

Dear Mr. And Mrs. Joe Garcia and family,

My name is Staff Sergeant Joseph D. Wiegrefe, I was your son's squad leader. I'd give anything to not be writing this letter right now, but I wanted you to know some things. First, I am deeply sorry for what happened to your son. You are in my prayers every day. I also want you to know that I think about what happened constantly and there is nothing that anybody did wrong that caused this. Everybody was doing the right thing and responded appropriately before, during, and after the attack. I want you to know that Specialist Garcia demonstrated extreme bravery that day. One of his fellow soldiers in another vehicle was taking fire. Your son could have taken cover inside our vehicle, but he wasn't like that. Instead, without hesitation, he manned his weapon and prepared to defend that soldier. When our vehicle started taking fire, I immediately turned and grabbed him to pull him into the vehicle but it was already too late. I did everything I could for him after he was hit. The medic, PFC McNabb also did everything she could for him. I wish things would have turned out different, but I can't tell you how proud I am of his actions. He was always looking out for his fellow Soldiers, and he was one of the most motivated and vigilant soldiers that I've ever had the honor of serving with. I will not go into details, but if you have any questions about what happened that day, let me know and I will answer honestly because I was there by his side the whole time.

Throughout the deployment, he spotted several roadside-bombs before they were able to detonate. Because of this, they were safely detonated and an unknown number of casualties were avoided. One of them in particular was a very large bomb that would likely have caused severe injury to several soldiers including myself. Because of your son, nobody was injured or killed and a couple of months ago, he was commended by the Battalion Commander and awarded a Battalion coin (an Army tradition).

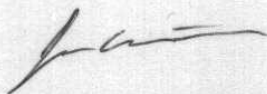
He was an outstanding soldier and a leader to his peers. We were in the process of sending him to the promotion board next month so he could be promoted to Sergeant. He deserved to be wearing the rank. He never got complacent and was always doing the right thing. He knew his job well and without having to be told, he always did what needed to be done. There aren't too many soldiers that I could say that about.

Whenever I think about my squad and the soldiers that I lead; it has always been Garcia that comes to mind first. He brought so much energy, enthusiasm and personality to the team and was just fun to be around. Everyone here loved him and he has a lot of friends in this unit, more than most people. He just always got along well with everyone. He will be missed very much and although it won't be the same and it won't be easy, we will get through this and continue our mission here. He will never be forgotten though. We will always keep all of the memories with us, and we will be sharing them for years to come.

I know you had a very difficult decision to make by honoring his living will. I truly believe that you made the right decision. My mother died unexpectedly when I was 11 years old. She had a brain aneurysm and my dad was faced with the same decision. I've never ever questioned or resented that decision, not for a second. She is with God now. Your son is also with God, as you know. When we first got to Iraq, our platoon started a tradition of always saying a prayer before going out on missions. Garcia was one of the soldiers who frequently volunteered to lead us in saying a prayer. He had a lot of faith and is now living peacefully with God. I find it comforting to know that we still have Specialist Garcia watching out for us. He will always be with us.

I'd really like to hear back from you sometime so that I know you received this letter. I understand you are going through a lot right now and you are very busy, so no rush. My e-mail address is: [REDACTED] Again, you have my deepest sympathy and you are all in my prayers.

Sincerely,



SSG Joseph D. Wiegrefe