



In what would be his last mission, Arredondo was to clear and secure a two-story building in Najaf, Iraq. Under intense, close-range enemy fire, with grenades exploding, Arredondo swiftly led his platoon to complete the mission's objective, according to a statement by his commander read aloud last month before Congress.

During his three weeks fighting in Najaf while on his second tour of duty, Arredondo displayed "the highest levels of selflessness and courage," his commander said, and what would be his final moments were a testament to his bravery.

After the building was secured, as he walked around to check on each squad member's well-being, an enemy sniper fatally shot Arredondo on Aug. 25, 2004, "giving his life fighting for freedom and defending his fellow Marines," the commander wrote.

"I think that that alone, that one paragraph, clearly underscores exactly what kind of a person Lance Corporal Alexander Arredondo was," US Representative Michael E. Capuano, a Somerville Democrat, said Nov. 29, reading the commander's account aloud before fellow House members voted to pass legislation to name the Post Office at 655 Centre St. in Arredondo's honor.

The bill passed the Senate Thursday and an official naming ceremony will be held next year, according to a joint release from Capuano, who authored the legislation, and US Senators John F. Kerry and Scott Brown, who each wrote letters to Senate committee members urging the bill's passage.

"For a man to give his life at such a young and tender age is an incredible thing, and I am proud," Capuano said on the House floor last month.

Arredondo earned the Navy and Marine Corps Commendation Medal with combat V and the Purple Heart for his actions during that battle. And a Post Office in what Arredondo's stepmother called his "home turf" will now be designated as the "Lance Corporal Alexander Scott Arredondo, United States Marine Corps Post Office Building."

"It's just overwhelming . . . It's a moment of peace with so much violence going on here," his father, Carlos Arredondo, said Friday.

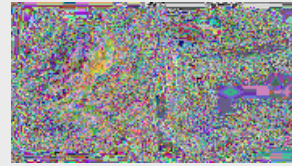
Alexander died on his father's 44th birthday. When Marine officers arrived in a government van to tell Carlos Arredondo his son had died, the father initially thought it was a surprise birthday visit from Alexander.

In the driveway of his Florida home, the father picked up a sledgehammer and smashed the windshield of the vehicle the Marines had arrived in. He poured gasoline on the van and himself and lit a torch, causing an explosion and serious burns on more than 20 percent of his body before the Marines rescued him.

After nearly a year of recovery, Carlos Arredondo began traveling the country with Melida speaking to raise awareness "about the cost of war," as well as about rules, laws, and other issues with military service they feel are unjust either for soldiers or their families.

The couple, who now live in Roslindale, remain committed to the outreach. The traveling took a toll physically, mentally, and financially, and they now work on efforts closer to home, including assisting other Boston-area families to raise funds for a scholarship they established at Blue Hill Regional Technical high school in Canton, from which Alexander graduated in 2002

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before joining the Marines.

Carlos Arredondo made national headlines for his intense emotional reaction, and he and Melida have become well known for their work afterward.

A Costa Rican native, he received US citizenship in 2006 with the help of the late Senator Edward M. Kennedy and through a 2003 law allowing parents of fallen soldiers to become citizens.

With Kennedy's continued support, the couple, around two years ago, began discussing ways to have Alexander's legacy live on permanently, but when Kennedy died of brain cancer on Aug. 25, 2009, the plans hit a snag.

A Kennedy aide helped the couple contact other local politicians before the Arredondos connected with Capuano.

"It's been a long process," said Melida. "But it finally happened."

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