

## Distinguished Alumnus Award

**SGT Chad Michael Mercer**  
**Awarded Posthumously**  
**JC 2000**



The Distinguished Alumni Award recognizes alumni whose lives have embodied the ideals of Georgia Military College including discipline, moral character, and learning; whose accomplishments have made a conspicuous and positive impression on those who will follow their lead; and whose lives are examples of extraordinary accomplishment.

Chad Mercer graduated from GMC in 2000. While attending the junior college, he was a member of the Chain of Command and on track to become an officer in the Early Commissioning Program; however, he confided in friends that he preferred to remain a front-line enlisted soldier because in that role he could have greater influence. COL Pat Beer, GMC Commandant of Cadets and Dean of Students, said of Mercer, "He was a great cadet. He had the biggest smile you could possibly believe and was always very friendly. He had a can-do attitude, and I remember he could run like the wind."

After leaving GMC, Mercer served with the 48th Brigade of the Georgia Army National Guard when that unit was deployed to Bosnia-Herzegovina in 2001 as part of a NATO peacekeeping operation. In 2005 he was again deployed with the 48th, this time to Iraq. He told his father-in-law before leaving, "I'm doing what I want to do. I'm fighting for my babies' freedom." During this time, Mercer was named brigade NCO of the Year.

On Thursday, June 30, 2005, Mercer died while serving in Iraq. He was killed when the Bradley fighting vehicle he commanded went off a narrow dirt road in darkness and tumbled into a canal. Having been hurt in a blast from a roadside bomb the day before, which knocked his regular vehicle out of service, Chad could have declined the mission. He didn't. His platoon commander said, "That's not the kind of soldier he was. It would never have occurred to him not to go." The commander of the 2nd Battalion, 121st Infantry regiment stated, "His soldiers respected him because of who he was. They wanted to be like him. His spirit will always be with us."

Chad Mercer is honored, in spirit, with the Distinguished Alumnus Award, to be presented posthumously to his family.

## Distinguished Alumnus Award

**SGT Michael James Stokely**  
**Awarded Posthumously**  
**JC 2002**



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Michael Stokely attended GMC as a State Service Scholarship cadet. COL Pat Beer, GMC Commandant of Cadets and Dean of Students, described Michael as "a great kid in every way, chain of command material". CSM Steve Stoner, in whose barracks Stokely spent most of his stay at GMC, said, "He was an outstanding cadet from day one. He was always first to volunteer for any additional requirements that came our way. After his first year here, he was selected to be a Cadet Captain (Company Commander) for the following year, but due to personal obligations, he decided not to return to GMC. He was well respected here in the Corps, and he was a well respected soldier by all accounts. He will be missed."

Since middle school Michael had talked about joining the armed forces. Soft-spoken, talkative and popular in high school, Michael's real interest continued to be the military - its structure, the camaraderie, and the sense of purpose. His stepfather had been a Marine, and a grandfather and an uncle had served in the Air Force.

When he was on the verge of 18 and considering the military, his father told him to ask himself two questions before joining the National Guard. "Are you prepared to kill? And are you prepared to be killed?" Michael did join the Guard and in May went to Kuwait on his way to Iraq. On Tuesday, August 16th, he was killed after stepping on an explosive device a few miles south of Baghdad. Stokely fulfilled his mission in life, that of becoming a soldier. He believed in what he was doing; he loved what he did; and he died, doing what he wanted to do.

Michael Stokely is honored, in spirit, with the Distinguished Alumnus Award, to be presented posthumously to his family.