

Hometown pays tribute to DLI grad killed in Kenya

By Jeremiah A. Armstrong

The Californian

MONTEREY — Army Sgt. Kenneth R. Hobson II was mourned Wednesday at a memorial service in his hometown of Lamar, Mo., while half a continent away, instructors at the Defense Language Institute in Monterey are still coping with the loss of a former student.

Hobson was killed Aug. 7 in the U.S. Embassy bombing in Nairobi, Kenya. That attack and a second bombing at the U.S. Embassy at Dar



HOBSON

■ Groups warn of terrorism/2A

es Salaam, Tanzania, killed 257 and injured 5,500.

"Was Staff Sgt. Hobson a hero?" Maj. Gen. Robert Flowers, commander of Fort Leonard Wood, where Hobson served basic training, asked mourners Wednesday. "I have four sons. If those four sons, God forbid, ever have to go to war, I would want them serving with or for Staff Sgt. Hobson. He is one of my heroes."

The drama that claimed the lives on 12 Americans unfolded slowly throughout the day of Aug. 7. Salwa Halabi, an 18-year Arabic language instructor at the Monterey institute, did not know until later that evening

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HOBSON: Ashes to be scattered at Big Sur

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that Hobson had been killed.

"Right away, I remembered the name, his face and that he was my student," Halabi recalled. "I was shocked, and I felt very sad. He was so young, and it's not fair."

Hobson was 27. He had spent five months in Kenya as an administrative specialist for the Army Defense Attaché.

Last week, the victims were memorialized at a state funeral at Andrews Air Force Base in Maryland. President Clinton told the crowd of Hobson's directions to scatter his ashes over the Pacific Ocean near Big Sur.

After serving in the Persian Gulf War, Hobson, who dreamed of one day becoming an ambassador, started an intensive 63-week program to learn Arabic in 1993 at the DLI.

Hobson was one of 10 students in a group taught by Halabi. His future wife, Deborah, a native of Maine, was also in the class.

Students spend six to seven hours a

day in the classroom. Then they perform military drills in the afternoon, followed by two hours of homework.

By the end of the course, students are exhausted but eager to use their new-found language skills, Halabi said. By graduation, students in Halabi's classes know enough standard Arabic to write it, read a newspaper and translate into English a television news report.

On Aug. 11, 1994, the couple announced plans to marry. Halabi said she was not surprised.

"They used to come to class on Monday morning and tell of their trips on the weekend," Halabi said Wednesday. "They'd go to Big Sur or Yosemite. They were in love with camping."

After graduation, Hobson went to Washington, D.C., to complete military intelligence training. Last winter, he was assigned to the Nairobi Embassy. Deborah and their 2-year-old daughter, Meghan, followed.

Hobson's father, Kenneth Hobson Sr., a communications officer for the Barton County Sheriff's Department and a Vietnam War veteran, never thought that his son would be killed in Kenya.

"He never gave me a reason to worry," Kenneth Hobson told a Missouri television station last week. "He never indicated that he felt any danger at all. He loved it over there. He liked going on safaris and things."

But Halabi, a native of Jordan, said her military students know the price of serving their country.

"The truth is they know the danger, but it doesn't bother them," she said.

Debbie Hobson spoke briefly at the memorial service Wednesday.

"I still can't say goodbye, because he's still in my heart," she said.

Then she read a poem that concluded with "Live your life to its fullest, and when you need me, just whisper my name. I will be there in your heart."

□ THE ASSOCIATED PRESS contributed to this report.

Former DLI student killed in Nairobi embassy bombing

BY KEVIN HOWE

Herald Staff Writer

A former student at the Defense Language Institute at the Presidio of Monterey was among the 12 Americans killed by a bomb blast in Nairobi, Kenya, on Friday.

Army Sgt. Kenneth R. Hobson II, 27, of Nevada, Mo., was assigned to the office of the defense attache at the embassy.

He was a student of Arabic at the language school from May 1993 to August 1994, according to DLI spokesman Bob Britton.

Hobson entered the Army in Missouri, Britton said, and took basic training at Fort Leonard Wood, Mo.

Army authorities reported that he was assigned to a variety of posts in Germany and in the Persian Gulf during the Gulf War, and at Fort Campbell, Ky., before his assignment to the Presidio.

Hobson graduated at skill level I, Britton said, qualifying him for reading and translating basic Arabic, and was assigned as a clerical aide to the Nairobi embassy's defense attache.

Hobson was one of three mili-

tary personnel at the embassy killed in the terrorist attack, according to Pentagon sources.

The other military casualties were Air Force Senior Master Sgt. Sherry Lynn Olds, 40, of Panama City, Fla., assigned to the Air Force Security Element in Nairobi, and Marine Sgt. Jesse N. Aliganga, 21, of Tallahassee, Fla., part of the embassy's security unit.

The bodies of the three service members and eight of nine civilian personnel at the embassy were due to arrive Wednesday at Andrews Air Force Base in Maryland.

The 12th American victim, Jean Dalizu, who was married to a Kenyan, will be buried in her adopted homeland.

The explosion Friday killed at least 192 people, including the 12 Americans and 33 Kenyans who worked at the embassy, and injured almost 5,000 others. A nearly simultaneous attack on the U.S. Embassy in neighboring Tanzania killed at least 10 people, all Africans.

(The Associated Press contributed to this report).

STAFF SERGEANT KENNETH R. HOBSON II

Staff Sergeant Kenneth R. Hobson II was born on 1 May 1971 in Placerville, California. He attended high school in Nevada, Missouri where he was involved in debate, Junior ROTC, and tennis.

He joined the Army in July 1989 and attended Basic Combat Training and Combat Engineer Training at Fort Leonard Wood, Missouri. He joined the 54th Engineer Battalion in Wildfleken, Germany in 1989 and served in the Persian Gulf during the Persian Gulf War. From February 1992 to May 1993, he served with the 325th Engineer Battalion (Airborne), 101st Airborne Division (Air Assault) at Fort Campbell, Kentucky.

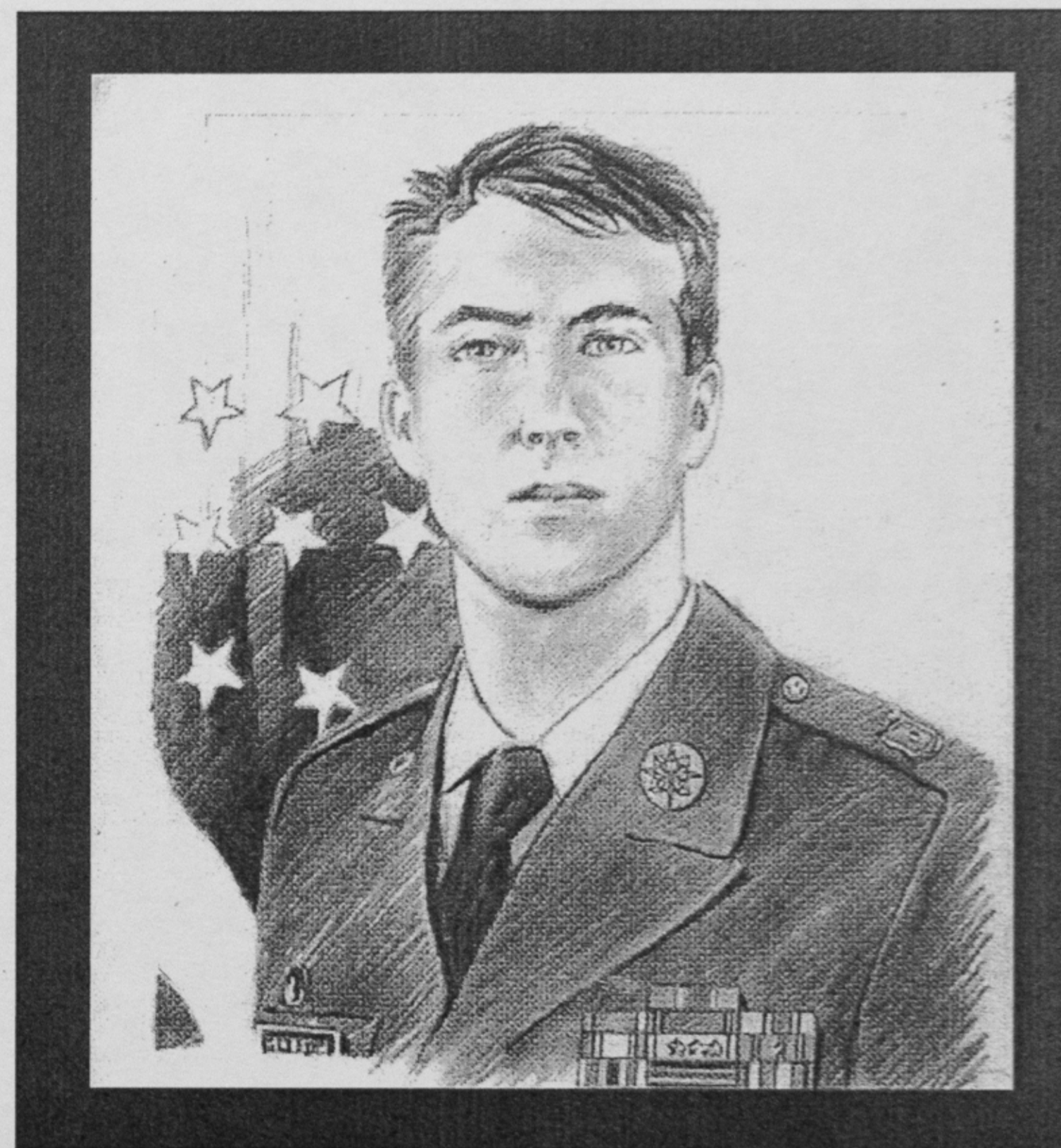
Staff Sergeant Hobson attended the Arabic Basic Course at the Defense Language Institute Foreign Language Center between June 1993 and August 1994. While here, he met SPC Deborah Murchison and they later married in 1994. He then attended Interrogator and Strategic Debriefing training at Fort Huachuca, Arizona.

In March 1995, he joined the 202d Military Intelligence Battalion at Fort Gordon, Georgia. After volunteering for attaché training, Staff Sergeant Hobson attended and graduated from DIA's Attaché Staff Operations Course. In April 1998, he became an Operations Noncommissioned Officer for the U.S. Army Element Defense Attaché Office, Nairobi, Kenya. On 7 August 1998, Staff Sergeant Hobson was killed along with 247 others when terrorists bombed the U.S. Embassy building. The Army granted him a posthumous promotion to Staff Sergeant because of his dedicated and courageous service.

Staff Sergeant Kenneth R. Hobson II awards and decorations include the Legion of Merit, the Purple Heart, and the Defense Meritorious Service Medal, the Army Commendation Medal, the Army Achievement Medal, the Good Conduct Medal (2d award), Southwest Asia Service Medal (w/Bronze Star), Kuwait Liberation Medal, Saudi Arabian Kuwait Liberation Medal, and the Air Assault Badge.

He is survived by his wife Deborah and their two daughters: Meghan, age 2 and Abigale, age 4 months.

Staff Sergeant Hobson Student Activities Center



Memorialization Ceremony 5 August 1999

SCHEDULE OF EVENTS

National Anthem

Invocation

Reading of SSG Hobson's
Biography

Installation Commander Remarks
Colonel Daniel D. Devlin

Guest Speaker Remarks
Colonel Gerald E. York

Remarks by
Mrs. Deborah Hobson

Unveiling and Ribbon Cutting
Ceremony

Reception to follow in the SSG Hobson Student Activities Center

COLONEL GERALD E. YORK

Colonel Gerald E. York serves as Chief, Office of Operations (DHO), Defense HUMINT Service, Directorate for Intelligence Operations.

Colonel York has a Bachelor of Arts Degree in History from Trevecca Nazarene College in Nashville, TN. He is a graduate of the Command and General Staff College. His military training includes the Military Operations Training Course, MI Officers Advanced Course, Intelligence Research Officer Course, Armor Officers Basic Course, Vietnamese Language Course at the Defense Language Institute Foreign Language Center, and the U.S. Army Airborne School.

Colonel York received his commission through ROTC. His initial active duty assignment was in Vietnam as a Coordination Advisor for the Phoenix Program (Phung Hoang Officer). His next assignments were as the MI Detachment Operations Control Officer, Assistant Research Officer and Assistant G2, XVIII Airborne Corps, Fort Bragg, NC. Colonel York then served in a series of assignments as an Intelligence Officer at Fort Monmouth, NJ, Redstone Arsenal, AL, and Fort MacArthur, CA. In May 1995, he was assigned as the provisional Base Chief and in October 1995 as Base Chief, Los Angeles Operating Base, Los Angeles, California. From May 1997 to October 1997, he was assigned as Base Chief, Korea Operating Base, Youngsan, Korea. From January 1998 to March 1998, he was assigned as Chief, CONUS Operations, Defense HUMINT Services. In March 1998, Colonel York was selected as the Chief, Office of Operations.

Colonel York is a decorated combat intelligence veteran with a tour of duty in Vietnam. Among his awards and decorations are a Legion of Merit, Bronze Star, three Meritorious Service Medals, Air Medal, Army Commendation Medal, Vietnam Service Medal, Armed Forces Reserve Medal, Army Service Ribbon, Vietnam Campaign Medal and the Parachute Badge. In addition, Colonel York was the recipient of the coveted Director Central Intelligence HUMINT Collector of the Year Award for 1990.

Colonel York is married to Betsy York, an FBI Special Agent. They have two sons and a daughter. 12 year old, Michael A. York, his older brother CPT Gerald E. York II, a medical doctor stationed at Fort Sam Houston, Texas, and their daughter Deborah M. York, who works at the Children's Hospital in San Diego, CA.