HAILEY KINSEL IS RUNNING FOR
WISCONSIN ARMY NATIONAL GUARD
SPC. MICHELLE M. WITMER

20, of New Berlin, Wis.; assigned to the Army National Guard's 32nd Military Police Company, Milwaukee, Wis.; killed April 9, 2004 during an attack by small-arms fire and an improvised explosive device in Baghdad.

HUNDREDS TURN OUT TO REMEMBER SLAIN SOLDIER
By Carrie Antlfinger, Associated Press

BROOKFIELD, Wis. — Michelle Witmer told her two sisters when she was 10 years old that she wanted to be a hero.

"She was a hero when she died," her identical twin, Charity, told more than 600 people Wednesday night at a memorial service for the 20-year-old, who died Friday in Iraq where all three sisters served with the National Guard.

Charity Witmer told the mourners that Michelle had told her and their older sister Charity as they talked about what they wanted to be when they grew up: "Seriously, I could push someone off a bridge and save them."

That brought chuckles from the crowd.

But tears quickly followed for many when Charity added, "It wasn't by saving someone in a lake. She was a hero when she died."

Major Gen. Albert Wilkening, adjutant general of the Wisconsin National Guard, presented Witmer's family, of New Berlin, with a Purple Heart, a Bronze Star and the National Defense Service Medal.

Michelle's father and mother read from Michelle's e-mails.

She had sent one to many people, updating them on her life. She said she was working night shifts and rarely got a day off.

Her mother, Lori, told how just a year before, Michelle was a college student and her only worries were restocking the ramen noodles.

She read an e-mail that Michelle addressed to her father, with the subject line "Daddy," pondering how the last year had changed her perspective on life, culture, war and things worth dying for.

"She began to think of her many experiences ... and she preferred to think of them as spices that gave the story of her life a richer flavor."

Charity, who tried hard to hold back tears, described Michelle as a klutz who loved candy.

"Michelle was a loving, empathetic woman, more wonderful than words can describe," she said. "She loved the drama, she loved the cheese, she loved to tell stories."

She also said her sister was at peace when she died.

"One of the last times I saw Michelle she gave me a big hug and kiss and said I love you. It was a gift from God. She was at such a good place when she left this world."

Brig. Gen. Kerry Denson, commander of the Wisconsin National Guard, said Michelle was very proud of her contributions to the Iraqi freedom.

Two large photographs of Witmer, including one of Michelle dressed in fatigues, stood at the front of the auditorium at Elmbrook Church.

Witmer, a specialist with the 32nd Military Police Company, was the first Wisconsin National Guard soldier to die in military combat in 60 years. She was assigned to the U.S. Army military police, doing police work in Baghdad.

Her sister Rachel, 24, also served in the 32nd, which was sent overseas last May. Charity was sent to Iraq late last year as a medic with Company B of the Wisconsin Guard's 118th Medical Battalion.

The sisters were granted leave and returned home Monday. They were still deciding whether to return to Iraq.

Gov. Jim Doyle attended the memorial service and told the state deeply respects the service and sacrifice they have given.

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