

# Pat Tillman

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**Patrick Daniel Tillman** (November 6, 1976 – April 22, 2004) was an American football player who left his professional sports career and enlisted in the United States Army in May 2002. He joined the United States Army Rangers and served multiple tours in combat before he was killed by "friendly fire" in the mountains of Afghanistan. Details about the circumstances surrounding his death have been the subject of controversy and military investigations.

He is the second professional football player to be killed in combat; the first was Bob Kalsu of the Buffalo Bills, who died in the Vietnam War in 1970.

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## Biography

### Football career

Pat Tillman was born in San Jose, California. He started his college career as a linebacker for Arizona State

### Pat Tillman

November 6, 1976 – April 22, 2004 (aged 27)



Pat Tillman

<b>Place of birth</b>	San Jose, California
<b>Place of death</b>	Sperah, Afghanistan
<b>Allegiance</b>	United States of America
<b>Service/branch</b>	United States Army
<b>Years of service</b>	2002–2004
<b>Rank</b>	Corporal
<b>Unit</b>	2nd Ranger Battalion
<b>Battles/wars</b>	2003 Invasion of Iraq Operation Enduring Freedom - Afghanistan (OEF-A)
<b>Awards</b>	Silver Star Purple Heart

### Pat Tillman



University in 1994, when he secured the last remaining scholarship for the team. He was a teammate of quarterback Jake Plummer who would later be his teammate on the hometown Arizona Cardinals. Tillman excelled as a linebacker at Arizona State, despite being relatively small for the position at five-feet eleven-inches (1.80 m) tall. As a senior, he was voted the Pac-10 Defensive Player of the Year. Academically, Tillman majored in marketing and graduated in three and a half years with a 3.84 GPA.

In the 1998 NFL Draft, Tillman was selected as the 226th pick by the Arizona Cardinals. Tillman moved over to play the safety position in the NFL and started ten of sixteen games in his rookie season. His 224 tackles that year remain the team's single-season record.<sup>[1]</sup>

At one point in his NFL career, Tillman turned down a five-year, \$9 million contract offer from the St. Louis Rams out of loyalty to the Cardinals.<sup>[2]</sup>

Sports Illustrated football writer Paul Zimmerman (Dr. Z) named Tillman to his 2000 NFL All-Pro team after Tillman finished with 155 tackles (120 solo), 1.5 sacks, 2 forced fumbles, 2 fumble recoveries, 9 pass deflections and 1 interception for 30 yards.

Tillman finished his career with totals of 331 tackles (242 solo), 2.5 sacks, 3 interceptions for 37 yards, 3 forced fumbles, 16 pass deflections, and 2 fumble recoveries in 60 career games. In addition he also had 1 rush attempt for 4 yards and returned 3 kickoffs for 33 yards.

In May 2002, eight months after the September 11, 2001, attacks and after completing the fifteen remaining games of the 2001 season which followed the attacks (at a salary of \$512,000 per year),<sup>[3]</sup> Tillman turned down a contract offer of \$3.6 million over three years from the Cardinals to enlist in the U.S. Army.<sup>[4]</sup>

## Military career

He enlisted, along with his brother Kevin, who gave up the chance of a career in professional baseball. The two brothers completed the Ranger Indoctrination Program in late 2002 and were assigned to the second battalion of the 75th Ranger Regiment in Fort Lewis, Washington. He resided in University Place with his wife before being deployed to Iraq. After participating in the initial invasion of Operation Iraqi Freedom, he



*Tillman's statue outside of University of Phoenix Stadium*

**Position(s):** Safety  
**Jersey #(s):** 40, 42

**Born:** November 6, 1976

**Died:** April 22, 2004 (aged 27)

### Career information

**Year(s):** 1998–2001

**NFL Draft:** 1998 / Round: 7 / Pick: 226

**College:** Arizona State

### Professional teams

- Arizona Cardinals (1998–2001)

### Career stats

*Tackles* 390

*INT* 3

*Sacks* 2.5

Stats at NFL.com (<http://www.nfl.com/players/profile?id=TIL573494>)

### Career highlights and awards

- Arizona Cardinals#40 retired
- Arizona State Sun Devils#42 retired

graduated from Ranger School.

## Religious and political beliefs

According to speakers at his funeral, he was very well-read, having read a number of religious texts including the Bible, Koran and Book of Mormon as well as transcendentalist authors such as Ralph Waldo Emerson and Henry David Thoreau; his younger brother Rich stated that he "is not with God... He was not religious."<sup>[5]</sup> Another article quotes him as having told then-general manager of the Seattle Seahawks Bob Ferguson in December 2003 that "you know I'm not religious".<sup>[6]</sup>

The September 25, 2005, edition of the *San Francisco Chronicle* newspaper reported that Tillman held views which were critical of the Iraq war and did not support President Bush's re-election. According to Tillman's mother, a friend of Tillman had arranged a meeting with Noam Chomsky, to take place after his return from Afghanistan. Chomsky has confirmed this.<sup>[7]</sup> The article also reported that Tillman urged a soldier in his platoon to vote for John Kerry in the 2004 U.S. Presidential election.<sup>[8]</sup>

## Death

Tillman was subsequently redeployed to Afghanistan. On April 22, 2004, he was killed in a friendly fire incident while on patrol. The specific details of his death and its aftermath are currently being investigated by the US Congress.

The Army initially claimed that Tillman and his unit were attacked in an apparent ambush on a road outside of the village of Sperah about 25 miles (40 km) southwest of Khost, near the Pakistan border. An Afghan militia soldier was killed, and two other Rangers were injured as well.

The Army Special Operations Command initially claimed that there was an exchange with hostile forces. After a lengthy investigation conducted by Brigadier General Jones, the U.S. Department of Defense concluded that both the Afghan militia soldier's and Pat Tillman's deaths were due to friendly fire aggravated by the intensity of the firefight.

A more thorough investigation concluded that no hostile forces were involved in the firefight and that two allied groups fired on each other in confusion after a nearby explosive device was detonated.

On July 26, 2007, AP received official documents stating that the investigating doctors performing the autopsy suspected that Tillman was murdered.<sup>[9]</sup>

## Controversy surrounding Tillman's death

A report described in *The Washington Post* on May 4, 2005, (prepared upon the request of Tillman's family) by Brig. Gen. Gary M. Jones revealed that in the days immediately following Tillman's death, U.S. Army investigators were aware that Tillman was killed by friendly fire, shot three times to the head.<sup>[10]</sup> Jones reported that senior Army commanders, including Gen. John Abizaid, knew of this fact within days of the shooting but nevertheless approved the awarding of the Silver Star, Purple Heart, and a posthumous

promotion. Lt. Gen. Stanley McChrystal approved the Silver Star citation on April 28, 2004, which gave a detailed account of Tillman's death including the phrase "in the line of devastating enemy fire", however the very next day he sent a P4 memo warning senior government members that Tillman might actually have been killed by friendly fire.<sup>[11]</sup> Top commanders within the U.S. Central Command, including former Commander of the United States Central Command (CENTCOM) General John Abizaid, should have been notified by the P4 memo,<sup>[12]</sup> which described Tillman's "highly possible" fratricide, four days before Tillman's nationally televised memorial service during which he was lauded as a war hero for dying while engaging the enemy.<sup>[13]</sup>

Jones reported that members of Tillman's unit burned his body armor and uniform in an apparent attempt to hide the fact that he was killed by friendly fire. Several soldiers were subsequently punished for their actions by being removed from the United States Army Rangers.<sup>[14]</sup> Jones believed that Tillman should retain his medals and promotion, since, according to Jones, he intended to engage the enemy and, in Jones's opinion, behaved heroically.<sup>[14]</sup>

Tillman's family was not informed of the finding that he was killed by friendly fire until weeks after his memorial service, although at least some senior Army officers knew of that fact prior to the service.<sup>[14]</sup> Tillman's parents have sharply criticized the Army's handling of the incident; Tillman's father charges that the Army "purposely interfered in the investigation" because of the effect it could have on their recruiting efforts while Tillman's mother charges that "this lie was to cover their image".<sup>[15]</sup>

His mother Mary Tillman told *The Washington Post*, "The fact that he was the ultimate team player and he watched his own men kill him is absolutely heartbreaking and tragic. The fact that they lied about it afterward is disgusting." Tillman's father, Patrick Tillman, Sr., was incensed by the coverup of the cause of his son's death, which he attributed to a conscious decision by the leadership of the U.S. Army to protect the Army's image.

“ After it happened, all the people in positions of authority went out of their way to script this. They purposely interfered with the investigation; they covered it up. I think they thought they could control it, and they realized that their recruiting efforts were going to go to hell in a handbasket if the truth about his death got out. They blew up their poster boy.<sup>[15]</sup> ”

He also blamed high-ranking Army officers for presenting "outright lies" to the family and to the public.<sup>[16]</sup>

Later, Tillman's father suggested in a letter to *The Washington Post* that the Army hierarchy's purported mistakes were part of a pattern of conscious misconduct:

“ With respect to the Army's reference to 'mistakes in reporting the circumstances of [my son's] death': those 'mistakes' were deliberate, calculated, ordered (repeatedly), and disgraceful — conduct well beneath the standard to which every soldier in the field is held.<sup>[17]</sup> ”

These complaints and allegations led the Pentagon's Inspector General to open a further inquiry into Tillman's death in August 2005.<sup>[8]</sup>

On March 4, 2006, the U.S. Defense Department Inspector General directed the Army to open a criminal

investigation of Tillman's death. The Army's Criminal Investigative Division will determine if Tillman's death was the result of negligent homicide.<sup>[18]</sup>

On March 26, 2007, the Pentagon released their report on the events surrounding Tillman's death and coverup. The report reads in part:

“ ...we emphasize that all investigators established the basic facts of CPL Tillman's death -- that it was caused by friendly fire, that the occupants of one vehicle in CPL Tillman's platoon were responsible, and that circumstances on the ground caused those occupants to misidentify friendly forces as hostile. None of the investigations suggested that CPL Tillman's death was anything other than accidental. Our review, as well as the investigation recently completed by Army CID, obtained no evidence contrary to those key findings.<sup>[19]</sup> ”

On April 24, 2007, his brother Kevin Tillman, testifying at a congressional hearing, stated, "The deception surrounding this case was an insult to the family: but more importantly, its primary purpose was to deceive a whole nation. We say these things with disappointment and sadness for our country. Once again, we have been used as props in a Pentagon public relations exercise."<sup>[20]</sup>

After Kevin's testimony Pete Geren, acting secretary of the Army stated to reporters, "We as an Army failed in our duty to the Tillman family, the duty we owe to all the families of our fallen soldiers: Give them the truth, the best we know it, as fast as we can."<sup>[20]</sup>

Tillman's diary was never returned to his family, and its whereabouts are not publicly known.<sup>[21]</sup>

On July 26, 2007, Chris Matthews reported on *Hardball* that Tillman's death may have been a case of fragging - specifically that the bullet holes were tight and neat, suggesting a shot at close range. Matthews based his speculation on a report from the doctors who investigated Tillman's body. The following day the Associated Press reported that a doctor who examined Tillman's body after his death wrote, "The medical evidence did not match up with the, with the scenario as described,"<sup>[22]</sup> also noting that the wound entrances appeared as though he had been shot with an M16 rifle from less than 10 yards (9 m) away. A possible motive, however, has never been identified. According to one of his fellow soldiers, Tillman "was popular among his fellow soldiers and had no enemies".<sup>[8]</sup>

In addition:<sup>[22]</sup>

- There has never been evidence of enemy fire found on the scene, and no members of Tillman's group had been hit by enemy fire.
- The three-star general who withheld details of Tillman's death from his parents for a number of months, told investigators "he had a bad memory, and could not recall details of his actions" on more than 70 occasions.
- Army attorneys congratulated each other in emails for impeding criminal investigation as they concluded Tillman's death was the result of friendly fire, and that only administrative, or non-criminal, punishment was indicated.
- Army doctors told the investigators that these wounds suggested murder and urged them to launch a criminal investigation<sup>[23]</sup>

- It has been revealed that there were never-before-mentioned US snipers in the second group that encountered Pat's squad<sup>[23]</sup>

## Congressional inquiries

On April 24, 2007, Spc. Bryan O'Neal, the last soldier to see Pat Tillman alive, testified before the House Committee on Oversight and Government Reform that he was warned by superiors not to divulge information that a fellow soldier killed Tillman, especially to the Tillman family. Later, Pat Tillman's brother Kevin Tillman, who was also in the convoy traveling behind his brother at the time of the 2004 incident in Afghanistan but did not witness it, testified that the military tried to spin his brother's death to deflect attention from emerging failings in the Afghan war.<sup>[24]</sup>

Thereafter the committee sought further information. The Bush administration turned over thousands of documents, described as "mostly press clippings," but refused to release others, citing "executive branch confidentiality interests." The committee's chair, Democrat Henry Waxman, and its ranking member, Republican Thomas M. Davis, wrote a joint letter describing the disclosure as "inadequate," saying, "The document production from the White House sheds virtually no light on these matters."<sup>[25]</sup>

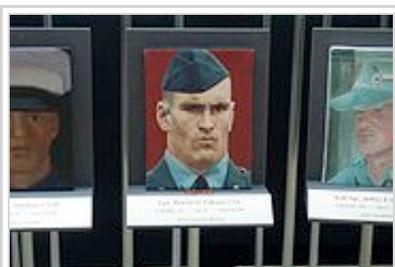
On August 13, 2007, *Sports Illustrated* reported that twenty U.S. military veterans who fought in Iraq and Afghanistan asked the NFL commissioner, Roger Goodell, to help secure the release of all documents relating to the death of Pat Tillman.<sup>[26]</sup>

On July 14, 2008 the House Committee on Oversight and Government Reform released a proposed report titled "Misleading Information from the Battlefield: The Tillman and Lynch Episodes".<sup>[27][28]</sup> The committee stated that its "investigation was frustrated by a near universal lack of recall" among "senior officials at the White House" and the military. It concluded:

The pervasive lack of recollection and absence of specific information makes it impossible for the Committee to assign responsibility for the misinformation in Corporal Tillman's and Private Lynch's cases. It is clear, however, that the Defense Department did not meet its most basic obligations in sharing accurate information with the families and with the American public.

## Reactions to Tillman's death

### Memorials and tributes



Tillman's portrait - Faces of the Fallen gallery - Arlington

After his death, the Pat Tillman Foundation was established to carry forward its view of Tillman's legacy by inspiring and supporting those striving for positive change in themselves and the world around them.

A highway bypass around the Hoover Dam will have a bridge bearing Tillman's name. When completed in September 2010, the Mike O'Callaghan-Pat Tillman Memorial Bridge will span the Colorado River between Nevada and Arizona.

the Pat Tillman gallery at Arlington National Cemetery.

Lincoln Law School of San Jose, CA has established the Pat Tillman Scholarship in honor of Tillman. Tillman's father, Patrick Kevin Tillman, earned his Juris Doctor from Lincoln in 1983.

On Sunday, September 19, 2004, all teams of the NFL wore a memorial decal on their helmets in honor of Pat Tillman. The Arizona Cardinals continued to wear this decal throughout the 2004 season. Former Cardinals quarterback Jake Plummer requested to also wear the decal for the entire season but the NFL turned him down saying his helmet would not be uniform with the rest of the Denver Broncos. Plummer would later grow a full beard and his hair long in honor of Tillman, who had such a style in the NFL before cutting his hair and shaving his beard off to fit military uniform guidelines. Plummer, now retired from the NFL, has since gone back to cutting his hair short but maintains the beard.

In 2005, Mike Ricci of the Phoenix Coyotes switched his uniform number to 40 in honor of Tillman.

The Cardinals retired his number 40, and Arizona State did the same for the number 42 he wore with the Sun Devils. The Cardinals have named the plaza surrounding their University of Phoenix Stadium in Glendale, **Pat Tillman Freedom Plaza**. Later, on November 12, 2006, during a Cardinals game versus the Cowboys, a bronze statue was revealed in his honor.

Pat Tillman's high school, Leland High School in San Jose, California, renamed its football field after him.

In 2004, the NFL donated \$250,000.00 to the United Service Organizations to build a USO center in memory of Tillman. The Pat Tillman USO Center, the first USO center in Afghanistan, opened on Bagram Air Base on April 1, 2005.<sup>[29]</sup>

Forward Operating Base Tillman is close to the Pakistan border, near the village of Lwara in Paktia Province, Afghanistan.<sup>[30]</sup>

On Saturday, April 15, 2006, more than 10,000 participants turned out for *Pat's Run* in Tempe, Arizona. The racers traveled along the 4.2-mile (6.8 km) course around Tempe Town Lake to the finish line, on the 42-yard (38 m) line of Sun Devil Stadium. A second race took place in San Jose. Sponsored by the Pat Tillman Foundation, a total of 14,000 runners took part. In 2005, about 6,000 took part in a single race in Tempe.

Just south of San Jose, California, in the small community of New Almaden where Pat Tillman grew up, a memorial was constructed near the Almaden Quicksilver County Park. This memorial was dedicated in September 2007 during the annual New Almaden Day celebration.<sup>[31]</sup>

The skateboarding bulldog featured on YouTube and in an Apple iPhone commercial was named after Tillman.<sup>[32]</sup>

It has since been announced that two books about Tillman will be published this year. Jon Krakauer, best-selling author of *Into Thin Air* and *Into the Wild*, wrote about Tillman in, *The Hero*



A memorial to Pat Tillman was created at Sun Devil Stadium, where he played football for the Sun Devils and the Cardinals.

(<http://www.amazon.com/dp/0385522266>) , set to be published by Doubleday in October. Meanwhile, Tillman's mother, Mary Tillman, also wrote a book about her son, *Boots on the Ground by Dusk* (<http://www.amazon.com/dp/1594868808>) , expected to be out in April.

Following Tillman's death, the Ohio State Linebackers Corp consisting of A.J. Hawk, Bobby Carpenter and Anthony Schlegel grew their hair in tribute to Tillman, imitating Tillman's trademark locks.<sup>[33]</sup>

In September 2008, Rory Fanning, a fellow Army Ranger who was stationed with Tillman in Fort Lewis, WA, began his "Walk for Pat" (<http://www.walkforpat.org>) — a walk across the United States in an effort to raise money and awareness for the Pat Tillman Foundation. The stated fundraising goal is \$3.6 million — the value of the contract Tillman turned down when he decided to enlist in the military.

## Controversial criticisms

After reports of Tillman's anti-war views became public, Ted Rall said that he was wrong to have assumed Tillman to be a "right wing poster child" when Tillman regarded the invasion of Iraq as illegal.<sup>[34][35]</sup>

Lieutenant Colonel Ralph Kauzlarich, Regimental Executive Officer at Forward Operating Base Salerno on Khowst, Afghanistan under which Tillman was serving at the time of his death, and who led the second investigation in to Tillman's death, has made controversial statements about the Tillman family's search for the truth based on Tillman's apparent agnosticism. In comments to ESPN, Kauzlarich said: "These people have a hard time letting it go. It may be because of their religious beliefs" and "When you die, I mean, there is supposedly a better life, right? Well, if you are an atheist and you don't believe in anything, if you die, what is there to go to? Nothing. You are worm dirt. So for their son to die for nothing and now he is no more... I do not know how an atheist thinks, I can only imagine that would be pretty tough."<sup>[36]</sup> Lt. Col. Ralph Kauzlarich conducted the second investigation into Tillman's death which lasted a week, from May 8, 2004, to May 15, 2004.<sup>[37]</sup> Brigadier General Rodney Johnson, the Commanding General of the United States Army Criminal Investigations Command, testified before Congress that he found these statements "totally unacceptable." Acting Department of Defense Inspector General Thomas Gimble also testified that he was "shocked" that Lt. Col. Kauzlarich would make these statements.<sup>[38]</sup> According to AP analysis, Kauzlarich may be one of three lower level officers expected to be punished whose names have not yet been released by the military. Tillman's mother continues to reject the Pentagon's characterization of the officers' offenses as "errors" in reporting Tillman's death, because several officers have said they made conscious decisions not to tell the Tillman family that fratricide was suspected.<sup>[39]</sup>

## See also

- Don Steinbrunner - NFL player killed in action during the Vietnam War
- Deaths in Sports

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- Tillman's sports page (<http://sportsillustrated.cnn.com/football/nfl/players/4455/>)
- A Cover-Up At The Highest Levels ([http://www.huffingtonpost.com/max-blumenthal/a-coverup-at-the-highest\\_b\\_7878.html](http://www.huffingtonpost.com/max-blumenthal/a-coverup-at-the-highest_b_7878.html))
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