



The U.S. Department of Defense on Saturday released the names of the 13 service members killed in Thursday's attack at the airport in Kabul. The attack marked one of the deadliest days for American forces in the past decade of the 20-year war in Afghanistan — and took place just days ahead of the U.S.'s planned full withdrawal from the country that was overtaken on Aug. 15 by the Taliban.

In a statement issued on Saturday, [President Biden called](#) the Americans who lost their lives in the bombing "heroes who made the ultimate sacrifice in service of our highest American ideals and while saving the lives of others."

"Their bravery and selflessness has enabled more than 117,000 people at risk to reach safety thus far," Biden said. "May God protect our troops and all those standing watch in these dangerous days."

Shortly after [a Saturday briefing at the Pentagon](#), Department of Defense officials said 11 Marines, one Army soldier and one member of the Navy were identified as those killed in the attack.

Article continues after sponsor message

Here's what NPR has learned so far about those killed, as reported by our staff, as well as other media outlets.

**Marine Corps Lance Cpl. David L. Espinoza, 20, of Rio Bravo, Texas**



An undated photo of David Lee Espinoza, a Marine among the 13 U.S. service members who were killed in a deadly airport suicide bombing in Kabul, Afghanistan, on Aug. 26, 2021.

U.S. Marines Handout/Reuters

Elizabeth Holguin told [local TV station KGNS](#) that she is trying to make sense of the death of her son, Lance Cpl. David Espinoza.

According to KGNS, Holguin received a phone call at 2:30 a.m. from the military to inform her that Espinoza had been killed in the explosion at the Kabul airport.

"He was a great kid. We never had trouble with him — nothing," she said of her son. "He never got in trouble. He was a great guy, a great guy, very proud of him."

Espinoza's stepfather, Victor Manuel Dominguez, became a part of his life at age three, but Dominguez saw him as his own.

"He was never my stepson and I was never his stepfather," he said.

Texas Rep. Henry Cuellar [released a statement on Facebook](#) saying that Espinoza is a hero and that his heart goes out to Espinoza's family during this difficult time.

"David Espinoza, a Laredo native Marine killed in Afghanistan, embodied the values of America: grit, dedication, service, and valor," Cuellar wrote. "When he joined the military after high school, he did so with the intention of protecting our nation and demonstrating his selfless acts of service. I mourn him and all the fallen heroes in Afghanistan."

**Marine Corps Sgt. Nicole L. Gee, 23, of Sacramento, Calif.**



This undated photo provided by U.S. Department of Defense Twitter page posted on Aug. 20 shows Sgt. Nicole Gee holding a baby at Hamid Karzai International Airport in Kabul. Officials said Saturday that Gee was killed in Thursday's bombing.

U.S. Department of Defense/AP

In 2016, Sgt. Nicole Gee graduated from Oakmont High School. Her husband, fellow Marine Jarod Gee, is also a graduate of Oakmont, [The Sacramento Bee](#) reports.

Just days before her death, Gee [posted a photo on Instagram](#) of herself in uniform while holding a baby in Afghanistan with the caption, "I love my job."

[Another of Gee's photos](#) — posted more recently — shows her posing near a cargo plane as a line of people wait to board from the back. The photo is captioned: "Escorting evacuees onto the bird."

Posting on social media, Roseville city officials called Gee "our hometown hero," and offered their "unwavering support" to her family, according to the *Bee*.

**Marine Corps Staff Sgt. Darin T. Hoover, 31, of Salt Lake City**



An undated photo of Taylor Hoover, 31, a Marine among the 13 U.S. service members who were killed in a deadly airport suicide bombing in Kabul, Afghanistan, on Aug. 26.

U.S. Marines Handout/Reuters

Utah Gov. Spencer Cox [released a statement Friday](#) offering condolences to Hoover's family, and saying he was "devastated" by the Marine's death. Cox noted that Hoover died while helping to evacuate U.S. citizens and Afghans seeking asylum.

"Staff Sgt. Hoover served valiantly as a Marine and died serving his fellow countrymen as well as America's allies in Afghanistan," Cox said. "We honor his tremendous bravery and commitment to his country, even as we condemn the senseless violence that resulted in his death."

Cox ordered to lower flags on state and public grounds until sunset on Monday.

[The Deseret News](#) reported that tributes to Hoover poured onto his Facebook page, including one from Hoover's father, who is also also named Darin.

"Sooooooo glad I got to see him before he left. I love you son!!! You're my hero!!!" the elder Hoover wrote. "Please check in on us once in a while. I'll try to make you proud!!!"

**Army Staff Sgt. Ryan C. Knauss, 23, of Corryton, Tenn.**



Army Staff Sgt. Ryan C. Knauss, 23, of Corryton, Tenn.

8th Psychological Operations Group

Speaking of her husband's death, Alena Knauss said the couple were "blissfully happy" but that he would have no regrets.

"For him, it's the ultimate honor he could give back to his country," she told Knoxville's [WBIR Channel 10](#). "To help those people and to know he was helping people, he would not be sorry. He would not regret it."

Knauss told [another local television station](#): "The last thing I had texted him was, 'Hey, I love you, when you get the chance--I know you are busy--but can you please just text me and let me know you are OK?' He never got to respond to that."

Since joining the army in 2016 — the same year the high-school sweethearts were married — Knauss, who was assigned to the 8th Psychological Operations Group at Fort Bragg, N.C., had risen quickly up the Army's enlisted ranks.

She said from high school, Knauss was determined to join the Army.

"I think the only person he was scared for was me. He did not question his job," she told Channel 10. "If they needed him in the middle of the woods at 4 a.m., he'd be in the middle of the woods at 4 a.m. If they needed him in Afghanistan in 30 minutes, he'd be there."

**Marine Corps Cpl. Hunter Lopez, 22, of Indio, Calif.**



An undated photo of Hunter Lopez, 22, a Marine among the 13 U.S. service members who were killed in a deadly airport suicide bombing in Kabul, Afghanistan, on Aug. 26.

U.S. Marines/Reuters

Lopez is the son of two Riverside County Sheriff's Department officers, Captain Herman Lopez and Deputy Alicia Lopez. The [department announced](#) Lopez's death on Friday.

Sheriff Chad Bianco said on Facebook that Lopez planned on following in his parents' footsteps and joining the department as a deputy when he got home from his deployment.

"Hunter, thank you for your service to our community and our country. My thoughts and prayers are with your family," Bianco said.

Before joining the Marines, Lopez participated in the department's career-oriented Explorer program from 2014 to 2017, while he was in high school, according to the sheriff's office.

**Marine Corps Lance Cpl. Rylee J. McCollum, 20, of Jackson, Wyo.**



An undated photo of Rylee McCollum, 20, a Marine among the thirteen U.S. service members who were killed in a deadly airport suicide bombing in Kabul, Afghanistan, on Aug. 26.

U.S. Marines Handout/Reuters

Wyoming Gov. Mark Gordon [tweeted on Friday](#), thanking McCollum for his service and sending condolences to his family.

"I'm devastated to learn Wyoming lost one of our own in yesterday's terrorist attack in Kabul," Gordon said. "Our thoughts and prayers are with the family and friends of Rylee McCollum of Bondurant. Jennie and I, along with all of Wyoming and the entire country thank Rylee for his service."

McCollum's father, Jim, [told \*The New York Times\*](#) that McCollum was helping with evacuations and guarding a checkpoint when the attack at the airport happened. His father said this was McCollum's first deployment and that he had gotten married recently. His wife is expecting with their first child.

McCollum's sister Cheyenne told [East Idaho News](#) that her brother was "going to be the best dad." Cheyenne said her brother was the youngest of four siblings, her single father's only son, and that he knew he wanted to be a Marine from a young age.

"He was a kid that touched everybody's heart," Cheyenne told East Idaho News. "He was a wrestler since he was 4. He knew he was going to be a Marine since he was about that same age. He used to walk around in just a diaper and in his sister's pink princess boots carrying his toy rifle and play like he was in the Army or a Marine."

His sister and his father told the *Times* that McCollum was a "beautiful soul" and that the family couldn't have been more proud of him.

**Marine Corps Lance Cpl. Dylan R. Merola, 20, of Rancho Cucamonga, Calif.**



An undated photo of Dylan Merola, 20, a Marine among the 13 U.S. service members who were killed in a deadly airport suicide bombing in Kabul, Afghanistan, on Aug. 26.

U.S. Marines Handout/Reuters

Cpl. Dylan Merola was a graduate of Los Osos High School, [according to ABC 7 of Los Angeles](#).

"A lot of our students commit to the military after they get out of school and we're so proud of all of them," Chaffey Joint Union High School District school board member Gil Zendejas was quoted in the [Daily Bulletin](#) as saying. "Our hearts and prayers and go out to his family and friends. Unfortunately, we have another Gold Star family in our district."

Student on Friday wore red, white and blue to honor Merola during Los Osos High School's first football game of the season.

**Marine Corps Lance Cpl. Kareem M. Nikoui, 20, of Norco, Calif.**



An undated photo of Kareem Nikoui, 20, a Marine among the 13 U.S. service members who were killed in a deadly airport suicide bombing in Kabul, Afghanistan, on Aug. 26.

U.S. Marines Handout/Reuters

Norco Mayor Kevin Bash told ABC7 that Nikoui died helping to save families of Afghans who had aided the U.S. government.

"My understanding is that he rescued - per a sergeant that wrote the family - he rescued three families," [Bash told the TV station](#). "And he was in the process of saving children, translators that had worked for the U.S. government. He passed off a child and went back into the crowd and that's when the bomb went off."

Nikoui graduated from Norco High School in 2019, where he was a member of the JROTC program.

Nikoui's father Steve [told The Daily Beast](#) that his son "loved what he was doing, he always wanted to be a Marine."

"He really loved that [Marine Corps] family," Steve told The Daily Beast. "He was devoted—he was going to make a career out of this, and he wanted to go. No hesitation for him to be called to duty."

The city of [Norco says it plans](#) to put Nikoui's name on the "Lest We Forget Wall" at the George A. Ingalls Veterans Memorial Plaza, which honors city residents "who made the ultimate sacrifice while serving our nation."

**Marine Corps Sgt. Johanny Rosario Pichardo, 25, of Lawrence, Mass.**



Sgt. Johanny Rosariopichardo pictured in a photo from May 2021.

U.S. Marine Corps

Rosario was assigned to the 5th Marine Expeditionary Brigade, Naval Support Activity Bahrain, according to the Department of Defense and [The Associated Press](#).

The mayor of her hometown of Lawrence, Mass., issued a [statement](#) after her death was announced, saying the city was "heartbroken" by the news.

Calling Rosario "a daughter of our City," Kendrys Vasquez said he had been in touch with the family and offered his "most sincere condolences and offer all of the aid that my administration can provide as they grieve this great loss."

The embassy of the Dominican Republic in Washington, D.C., offered its condolences in a [tweet](#) to "the young woman of Dominican origin, Johanny Rosario Pichardo, 25, who was one of the victims of the recent terrorist attack at the airport in Kabul, Afghanistan."

**Marine Corps Cpl. Humberto A. Sanchez, 22, of Logansport, Ind.**



Marine Humberto Sanchez, 22, was among the 13 U.S. service members who were killed in a deadly airport suicide bombing in Kabul, Afghanistan, on Aug. 26.

U.S. Marines Handout/Reuters

Sanchez, a 2017 graduate of Logansport High School, was a promising athlete, academic and a devoted art student at the school, according to principal Matt Jones.

Jones [tweeted](#) that Sanchez "serving our country in uniform and sacrifice."

Chris Martin, the mayor of Logansport — a city of about 18,000 located in north-central Indiana — called on others "to continue the ripple effect of making a positive change in our world."

In a [Facebook post](#), Martin said of Sanchez: "Any plans he may have had for his post-military life were given in sacrifice due to the heart he exhibited in putting himself into harm's way to safeguard the lives of others."

**Marine Corps Lance Cpl. Jared M. Schmitz, 20, of St. Charles, Mo.**



An undated photo of Jared Schmitz, 20, a Marine among the 13 U.S. service members who were killed in a deadly airport suicide bombing in Kabul, Afghanistan, on Aug. 26.

U.S. Marines Handout/Reuters

Schmitz was on his first deployment, having been sent from Jordan to help with evacuation efforts.

His father, Mark Schmitz, tells *Morning Edition* that from a young age, Jared "was constantly happy. If you had the opportunity to look through our photo albums, you would see that no matter how we captured him on a camera, he was always smiling nonstop."

Jared wanted to be a Marine from his sophomore year of high school. Jared wasn't the studious type, Mark says, but once he set his mind on it, he was laser focused on learning everything he could about the Marines. He had to have his parents' permission when he signed up at age 17.

"I can't even hold a candle to that young man," his father says. "He has taught me so much. He's a hell of an American. A true hero in every sense of the word.

"I'll never see my son get married," Mark Schmitz says. "I'll never see him do anything — provide me grandkids — anything. It's all gone now. It didn't need to happen, it shouldn't have happened. But love our military, support these guys. All of them."

Lexie Correa, Schmitz's former girlfriend whom he kept in touch with, [told Fox 2 News St. Louis](#) that she will miss his laugh the most.

"You could be having the worst day ever and just a phone call from him would make your day so much better," Correa said.

Correa, who said she also joined the military, said that Schmitz was obsessed with the local hockey team, the St. Louis Blues and remembered a watch party where "he got so excited when we won that Stanley Cup."

**Navy Hospital Corpsman Maxton W. Soviak, 22, of Berlin Heights, Ohio**



An undated photo of Max Soviak, 22, a Navy medic among the 13 U.S. service members who were killed in a deadly airport suicide bombing in Kabul, Afghanistan, on Aug. 26.

U.S. Marines Handout/Reuters

The Soviak family released a statement on Saturday about the loss of their son Max, who they say planned to make a career out of his Navy service.

"Words cannot express how heartbroken we are with this news and we will miss Max tremendously," the statement said. "We are struggling to come to grips with this personal tragedy and prefer to grieve with close friends and family."

His family says that Max was most proud of being a Navy Corpsman and "devil doc" for the Marines.

The statement said Max leaves behind a big family of 12 brothers and sisters.

Multiple Ohio lawmakers released statements about Max's death, including Ohio [Sen. Rob Portman](#), Rep. [Marcy Kaptur](#) and Rep. [Tim Ryan](#). All of them expressed their condolences for his family and friends.

"Our nation mourns the loss of Navy Corpsman Max Soviak, whose uncommon courage in the face of unfathomable danger ensured the safe passage of countless civilians," Kaptur said in her statement. "We will never be able to repay the debt we owe him, but we will be forever grateful for his willingness to serve when America needed him most. Our hearts go out to his family during this time, and we lift them up in prayer that they may find comfort in his memory."

**Marine Corps Cpl. Daegan W. Page, 23, of Omaha, Neb.**



An undated photo of Daegan William-Tyler Page, 23, a Marine among the 13 U.S. service members who were killed in a deadly airport suicide bombing in Kabul, Afghanistan, on Aug. 26.

U.S. Marines Handout/Reuters

Page served in the 2nd Battalion, 1st Marine Regiment based at Camp Pendleton, Calif.

He joined the Marines after graduating from Millard South High School in Omaha. He grew up in Nebraska and Iowa, his family said in [a statement](#) published in the *Omaha World-Herald*.

He was a Boy Scout who played hockey in his youth. He was a die-hard Chicago Blackhawks fan, the family said.

Page had a "tough outer shell and giant heart" and had the words "Death Before Dishonor" tattooed on his chest, the statement said.

The family started a public [Facebook page](#) on his behalf.

Omaha Mayor Jean Stothert [announced](#) in a Facebook post that the city was planning to show its support by "lining Abbott Drive near Eppley airport. Bring flags, signs, etc."