

Overpass Renamed for Fallen Marine

A Californian killed during the evacuation of Afghanistan was posthumously honored in his home state

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Marine Corps Lance Cpl. Dylan Merola was in Afghanistan less than two weeks when he died. The 20-year-old Californian was among the 13 Americans killed in a suicide bombing on Aug. 26, 2021, while trying to evacuate people from Kabul's Hamid Karzai International Airport.

Assigned to 2nd Bn., 1st Marines, 1st Marine Div., I Marine Expeditionary Force, Merola graduated in 2019 from Los Osos High School in Rancho Cucamonga, California, and had his sights set on going to college to study engineering after he got out of the Marines.

To honor Merola, the Haven Avenue 210 Freeway overpass was named for the young Marine in a ceremony on Oct. 28, 2022, just over a year after his death. Haven Avenue passes near Merola's former high school.

Among the many speakers at the dedication was Merola's mom, Cheryl Rex, who said she wants her son's story remembered.

"Dylan, I made a promise to you that I would continue to tell your story and show people how amazing you are for all you have to offer, mostly giving your life for others to live," Rex said during the ceremony. "Dylan took pride in his efforts to get as many people to safety as possible. He would stand up and do this all over again just to save one more person."

Legislation to rename the overpass was introduced by California Assemblyman James Ramos on Feb. 15, 2022, which was approved on Aug. 19. The new overpass sign was funded by donations from multiple veterans' groups, including the Marine Corps League.

"Lance Corporal Dylan Merola made the ultimate sacrifice for our country," Jeff Breiten, past commandant of the Redlands Detachment of the Marine Corps League, told the Orange County Register. "The only thing we can do is help to keep his memory alive, and by putting

NATIONAL HEADQUARTERS

406 W. 34th Street
Kansas City, MO 64111
Office 816.756.3390
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WASHINGTON OFFICE

200 Maryland Ave., N.E.
Washington, D.C. 20002
Office 202.543.2239
Fax 202.543.6719

info@vfw.org
www.vfw.org

that signage up, we are working towards that.”

Rex told Stars and Stripes that she stays in touch with the families of the other men and women killed alongside her son.

“It does help to have the other families knowing that we’re all going through the same thing at the same time,” Rex said. “I knew that we’d be connected for years and years to come.”

The Chaffey Joint Union High School District, to which Los Osos High School belongs, is working with veterans organizations including the VFW to raise about \$60,000 to build a memorial to fallen military alumni. Merola’s name will be the first to be inscribed.

VFW Post 8680 in Rancho Cucamonga has contributed \$14,000 to the project.

“We appreciate the overwhelming generosity of the community and the commitment of the VFW, American Legion and other veterans organizations as we work together to support Dylan’s family and memorialize his sacrifice on behalf of our country,” District Superintendent Mat Holton said in a written statement. “He was a wonderful student, and the entire Chaffey district community misses him dearly.”

This article is featured in the 2023 April issue of [VFW magazine](#), and was written by [Janie Dyhouse](#), associate editor for VFW magazine.