

## Female Buffalo Soldier



Lieutenant Emily Perez could very well be considered a modern day Cathay Williams. While she is not the first or the only black woman in the U.S military to suffer a fatality in combat, she is the **first** in a different kind of way.

Emily Jazmin Tatum Perez (1982/1983-12 September 2006) was the **first** female minority Command Sergeant in the history of the United States Military Academy at West Point.

Born in Heidelberg, West Germany of African American and Hispanic parents, she graduated from Oxon Hill High School, in Maryland, where she was wing commander of Junior ROTC. While in high school, working with the District's Peace Baptist Church, Perez helped begin an HIV-AIDS ministry after family members contracted the virus.

Following graduation from West Point, she became a second lieutenant in the 204th Support Battalion, 2nd Brigade, 4th Infantry Division of the United States Army. Shortly before shipping out to Iraq, she flew cross-country to be a bone marrow donor for a stranger who was a match. Perez deployed to Iraq in December as a Medical Service Corps officer. She was killed September 12, 2006 when a makeshift bomb exploded near her Humvee during combat operations in Kifl, near Najaf. Aged 23, she was the **first** female graduate of West Point to die in the Iraq War as well as the **first** West Point graduate of the "Class of 9/11" to die in combat. Her decorations include the Purple Heart, Bronze Star Medal, Commendation Medal, National Defense Service Medal, Army Service Ribbon, the Overseas Service Ribbon, and the Combat Action Badge.

Emily Perez was the 64th female member of the U.S. military to be killed in Iraq or Afghanistan and the 40th West Point graduate killed since the September 11, 2001 attacks. Another female West Point graduate, Laura M. Walker of the Class of 2003, was killed in Afghanistan in 2005.

The nation mourns the death of Lt Emily Perez, 23, who graduated in the top 10 percent of her class, out-ran many men, directed a gospel choir, and read the Bible every day. She headed a weekly convoy as it rolled down treacherous roads, pocked with bombs and bullets near Najaf, Iraq. As platoon leader, she insisted on leading her troops from the front.

Lieutenant Perez was interred at the West Point Cemetery.