





Major Brent Taylor

Utah Army National Guard
July 6, 1979 – November 3, 2018



Brent Taylor was born on July 6, 1976 in Ogden, Utah. From the start, he has always been a leader in his endeavors. He graduated from Chandler High School, where he was elected as student body president and earned an eagle scout award. Strongly rooted in his faith, Brent served a mission for the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints from 1998-2000 after his graduation. Brent was called upon to serve in the Brazil, Maceio Mission.

Prompted by the terrorist attack on September 11, 2001, Brent enlisted in the military to serve his country. Led by his courage, he would go on to be awarded a Purple Heart Medal and a Bronze Star Medal during his service in Operation Iraqi Freedom. Major. He was commissioned as an officer in 2006. Brent had just surpassed the 15-year mark of his military career before he was killed.



Brent earned his bachelor's degree from Brigham Young University in political science in 2006. Brent would later go to the University of Utah for a Master of Public Administration degree in 2013. He was on track to graduate with doctorate's degree before he was killed in action. In May 2019, the University of Utah awarded Brent a posthumous PhD.

Major Taylor deeply cared about his community and wanted to make an impact. This led him to join North Ogden's city council in 2009. Four years later, Brent would go on to become the mayor and re-elected in 2017. He was trusted by members of his community and listened to the voices of his constituents. Brent then announced his deployment to Afghanistan. He said it was his duty to serve his country and help train Afghan forces.

Major Brent Taylor was on his second term as the mayor of North Ogden when he took an unprecedented year of absence to serve his fourth deployment in Afghanistan. In November of 2018, Major Taylor was killed in an insider attack in Kabul. This made him the first sitting U.S. politician to be killed in action since the Civil War. He is survived by his wife, Jennie Taylor, and seven children. To Brent, God, family and country were everything and had become his mantra that steered his life.





Petty Officer Third Class Michael Halpert

United States Navy

December 26, 1977 – July 1, 2009

Michael was born in Livingston NJ and grew up in Verona NJ.

Michael was a smart and curious child who excelled in many school programs, meeting the standards of presidential fitness awards, outstanding academic achievement and classes for gifted and talented students. Most importantly he was very sentimental with a heart of gold.

Michael was a natural athlete who enjoyed sports such as baseball, soccer, skiing, horses, and ice hockey.

His strong desire and drive to succeed from a very early age enabled him to push through barriers that may have prevented him from becoming successful.

After graduating from Verona High School he continued his education and earned his Bachelor of Arts Degree from Montclair State University,

Michael pursued a number of careers and then as a result of the uncertainties that 9/11 brought, he enlisted in the U.S. Navy when he was 30 years old. He finally found his purpose and began to excel at a career of his choosing, to be a bigger part of an important endeavor.

Upon completion of boot camp in May of 2008, Michael entered the U.S. Navy as a Submariner and subsequently succeeded in becoming a Petty Officer in 12 months. He worked very hard to accomplish the title of Petty Officer and was extremely happy to be serving his country with pride. He had committed to serve for at least 5 years and his long term goal was to pursue Air-Sea-Rescue, while looking forward to traveling while in the service.



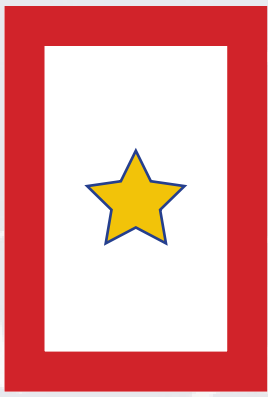
Shortly after Michael was promoted to Petty Officer, his life was cut short and ended tragically while stateside, waiting for his top security clearance and deployment. He was stationed at the Naval Submarine Base in Groton, Ct. when he went to the aid of his shipmate who had been assaulted. During this incident, he sustained a traumatic brain injury and never regained consciousness and died on July 1, 2009. Some say that his actions that fateful day made him a hero, but in his loved one's eyes, his courage and service to our country made him more than a hero..the love for a mission of accomplishment to serve our great nation with the best of intentions has become his legacy.

Michael touched the hearts of so many people in his lifetime with his loyalty and kindness..he was the kind of friend and shipmate who made his family extremely proud. His sense of humor and infectious laughter will be deeply missed forever by all who were lucky enough to have known him.



Michael's mother, Maxine, and step-dad, Paul, often share this quotation, "Greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends." John 15:13





Sergeant Robert Louis Crews

United States Army

January 12, 1947 - April 22, 1968



Bobby was a 5th generation Floridian, born in Ft. Myers, Florida on January 12, 1947. He was the first child and only son of Pliny Butler (P. B.) and Carlynn (Polly) Crews, who also had two daughters, Linda and Marilyn. The Crews family moved to Naples in 1958 where Bobby and his sisters attended school at Lake Park Elementary, Gulf View Junior High School and Naples High School. Bobby graduated with the class of 1965.



Bobby enjoyed growing up in south Florida and being outdoors. His dad taught him to hunt and fish at an early age and he became an avid hunter and outdoorsman. He had his own hunting buggy (swamp buggy) that he worked on and he his friends enjoyed taking it hunting and camping in the Everglades. He was a very kind, caring, Christian friend and a protective brother to his younger sisters. He also had a very good singing voice, enjoying harmonizing with his family and becoming a song leader at their church.

Bobby enlisted in the Army because he knew he would eventually be drafted and wanted to go voluntarily. He served in communications and was first stationed in Germany where he made good friends and sent presents back home to his family. He made friends easily and seemed to always be looking out for the other person, evidenced by his death during the Vietnam war.

Being the last male child to carry on the Crews name, Bobby could have claimed an exemption from being sent to Vietnam. But that's who Bobby was...the friend who would go to war in hopes that his married friends with children would not have to (his words), the Sergeant who walked as the point man on a dangerous mission instead of sending another soldier in first and never asking someone to do a job he was not willing to do himself (also his words). He died, May 22, 1968, near Camp Evans, leading his platoon on a second search and rescue mission attempt, knowing the first soldier in that day would be the one who wouldn't make it home.

A quote from his mother was, "Nobody is perfect. Bob wasn't either, but he was pretty close."

After his death, his mom made it her life long ambition to start a local Gold Star Mothers chapter. She finally succeeded when she was 92 years old, passing away a year later. The Southwest Florida Gold Mothers Star chapter she helped start meets at the Ft. Myers Mission BBQ.

The Crews family was and is very patriotic and proud of their son and brother who gave his life for his country.

All gave some, some gave all.





Corporal Thomas “Tommy” Jardas

United States Marine Corps

April 25, 1993 - January 14, 2016



Tommy grew up with a servant's heart, wearing many uniforms in his 8,300 days on this earth. He loved his family & friends, his school and the United States Marine Corps.

Tommy enjoyed Little League Baseball at Ruttenburg Park, Cub Scouts Pack 140 and youth group at St. Columbkille Catholic Church. He grew taller and stronger and joined the Cypress Lake High School JROTC, Varsity Swimming and the Media Center for The Arts. Everyone knew him as “Tommy with Sports” reporting for the Panther 4 News Crew. After school and on the weekends, our hometown hero was the friendly smile behind the counter scooping Love Boat Ice Cream. Customers still ask about the bright young Marine who connected with everyone he met.

He often had a prank or joke on hand, yet he took his duties as a JROTC Cadet very seriously. Tommy believed that everyone can serve their country in some way. He enlisted in the United States Marine Corps on May 5 th , 2011, one month before graduating from Cypress Lake High School.



After completing boot camp at Parris Island, SC, Tommy trained at the Pensacola Naval Air Base and completed Flight School at Cherry Point, NC. He was then stationed at the Marine Corps Base in Kaneohe Bay, Hawaii, serving with the Heavy Helicopter Squadron. He was so proud of his Squadron, Pegasus HMH-463 and to fly as Crew Chief on the CH-53E “Super Stallion” helicopters.

On the evening of January 14th, 2016, Tommy sent a Snapchat to his friends, dressed in his flight suit and night vision goggles stating “I have the coolest job.” At 10:31 pm that night, two CH-53E Super Stallion helicopters, Pegasus 31 and 32, collided during a night training mission off the North Shore of Oahu. Twelve brave Marines were killed in the crash, including Tommy. He was 22 years old.

His decorations include the National Defense Service Medal, Global War on Terrorism Service Medal, The Marine Corps Good Conduct Medal and the Sea Service Deployment Ribbon. He was interred with Military Honors at Arlington National Cemetery on Sept. 30, 2016 in section 60.

A lasting memorial stands at Cypress Lake High School honoring the sacrifice Tommy and his 11 Pegasus brothers made for our freedom. Above the memorial, the American Flag and the USMC Flag fly with the breath of our fallen heroes. Semper Fi



Photos donated and story told by Beth Haely, Tommy's mother



Sergeant Dillon Semolina

United States Marine Corps

November 22, 1991 - January 14, 2016



Dillon Joseph Semolina was born November 22, 1991 in Buffalo, MN. I will never forget holding him for the first time after a difficult breech delivery. He certainly made a statement while entering this world. He was going to make his mark and most certainly did so throughout his life.

Dillon was a very curious and active young child; he enjoyed the outdoors, animals, sports, reading and spending time with his family. Starting at age 10 he drew pictures of himself in a military uniform, saluting, with a caption 'Yes, Sir'. At that age, he was thinking and talking about protecting and shielding America from harm.

Dillon felt he could do anything. That confidence and belief in himself would shape the rest of his life. I can honestly say I have never seen Dillon fearful of trying anything. In high school this occasionally landed him in the Principal's office! His strong beliefs and standards in exercise and health quickly put him on football, basketball, and golf teams. Dillon often described his body as a 'temple' and treated it as such. He exercised religiously and although he was 6'4" and 210 lbs, his heart was so tender. Military recruiters were often at the school trying to recruit him because they saw something in Dillon in how he carried himself.

After his high school graduation Dillon pondered his direction in life. He wanted to do something and be someone that made a difference. Dillon's first 'real' job was in the mess hall for the 934th Airlift Wing on the Air Force Reserve base in Minneapolis. With the idea of joining the military he began acquiring more information from both the Air Force and the Marine Corps.

Dillon joined the Marine Corp on Sept 12th 2011 signing for 5 years - one year more than typical contracts as he needed a year of flight school. We will never forget saying Goodbye to him that day; I would say this was the hardest thing I have ever had to do. He excelled as a Marine becoming the Company Guide in boot camp and receiving a meritorious promotion to Lance Corporal. Once a crew chief for the CH-53E Helicopter, he was recognized for his professionalism, sense of direction, and leadership skills which quickly promoted him to Corporal, and then Sergeant. He was so respected by his flight line, the bonds were impenetrable.

Dillon and 11 of his brothers tragically left us on Thursday January 14th 2016 after a collision with another helicopter during a routine CH-53E night training mission on Marine Corp Base Hawaii. He would never hesitate to give the shirt off his back, or to protect anyone in harm's way. His heart and compassion were overwhelmingly beautiful. Dillon's future was to be an anesthesiologist after he finished his tour with the Marine Corps, September, 2016. His plans were to start school in the fall and start his general studies. His success in these subjects would have been extraordinary as he never quit anything that challenged him. He made sure what he did accomplish was so complete that it left his signature mark for others to feel and learn from. His motivation, dedication, and smile live on through all the lives that he touched. Dillon we love and miss you dearly.



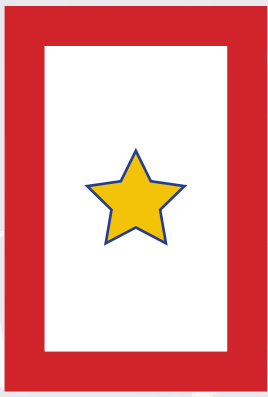
The following is a poem written by Dillon when he was ten years old:

“I would give the poor money to live on without making them working for it. By asking other people who care and give some money to the poor. And get them new clothes for them.

I would make the weak and unhealthy people be strong and healthy. By getting medicine for the people who need some. Also I will give them extra food that is good for them to make them strong and healthy.

I would restore the animals that are extinct by asking the scientists to create DNA for the animals. And try to create a hunting shield to protect the animals. And let them live in one safe nation.

And I would let there be no more wars so everyone can be happy and safe. By getting shields for America and other countries so everybody can be safe in their country forever.”



Lance Corporal Austin James Ruiz

United States Marine Corps

September 4, 1997 - January 13, 2017



On September 4, 1997 we were blessed with a son named Austin James Ruiz. I chose the name Austin because it means 'majestic and powerful'. Austin was a toddler that was curious about everything and collected oddities. He would overturn every rock and get into all kinds of mischief. At the young age of 8, he was visiting a Naval museum in Pensacola with his aunt and when he saw the dress blues in a shadow box, he told her that he would one day wear that uniform.

He was often referred to as an old soul, he seemed wise beyond his years and had a very intuitive soul. Austin was in Cub Scouts and I believe this cultivated his love for the outdoors and being part of a brotherhood. The lessons he learned stayed with him throughout his youth. He was so active and loved to play paintball, fish and kayak. He was an all-around outdoorsman.



Austin went to Naples High and joined JROTC and the football team. He made friends everywhere he went and was always an advocate for the underdog. If someone was eating alone, he joined them. If someone was being mistreated or bullied, he intervened. His heart was selfless, his soul kind.

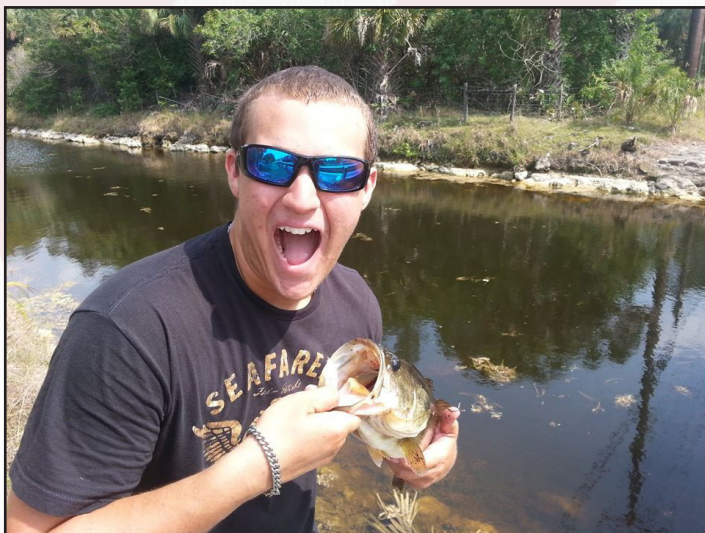
Austin only had 19 years with us but he lived a beautiful life and left an impression on his family and peers. We received so many sentiments from friends and strangers but all of them had a common denominator; they loved Austin and his smile. We learned of his antics, good deeds and got to see a part of Austin we did not know through his fellow Marines and it was very rewarding as a parent.

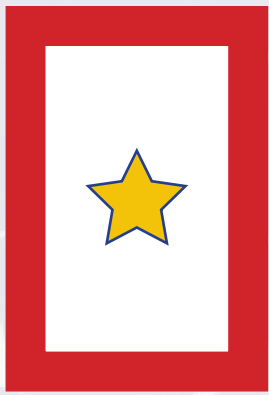


A few months after Austin's passing, we received a letter from a Marine from his company and he wrote a few funny stories but one that spoke to me was the day of the accident in California. It was a rough day and Austin's positivity and humor kept the squad upbeat. He quoted Austin as saying "one day you're going to look back and smile". That quote sums up my brave son's life. He was the sun to a cloudy day and the smile to dry up a tear.

Semper Fi son

Sunrise 09/04/1997 • Sunset 01/13/2017





Captain Daniel William Eggers

United States Army

July 15, 1975 – May 29, 2004

Daniel was born in Pueblo, Colorado and spent his early years in Hollis, New Hampshire. In 1987 he and his family moved to Cape Coral, Florida. He was a devout Catholic and an altar boy during middle school and high school. He attended Gulf Middle School and graduated from Cape Coral High School. While at Cape High, Dan was enrolled in the JROTC program and was the Battalion Commander in his senior year. He was a member of the National Honor Society and also ran on the cross-country team. Dan was in the Young Marines, the United States Marine Corps' youth program. In 1991, he was selected as the National Young Marine of the Year. When he was in the 8th grade Dan asked, "Mom, can a man be a soldier and a priest at the same time?" My wife told him, "Yes, they can." She explained that there are chaplains in the armed services and some of the Catholic chaplains are ordained Catholic priests. When Dan was in high school and discovered girls he side-tracked the chaplain route. He graduated from The Citadel in Charleston, South Carolina with a degree in history and was commissioned as a Second Lieutenant in the U.S. Army Infantry in May 1997.

In July 2001 he began training for Special Forces and earned the Green Beret two years later. He went through the Army Arabic Language School and was fluent in Arabic, he did not need an interpreter. CPT Eggers was deployed to Afghanistan in April 2003. While in Afghanistan as a Green Beret team leader in the 1st Battalion, 3rd Forces Group (Airborne) he carried out secret missions.



CPT Eggers came from a large family with a long tradition of military service....a great-great-grandfather was a member of Theodore Roosevelt's Rough Riders, a great uncle died during WWI in 1918; two grandfathers who served in WWII, his father served in Vietnam, and his younger brother served two tours in Iraq.

On May 29, 2004, CPT Eggers was killed in action in Zabul Province in southeastern Afghanistan when his Humvee struck a land mine as they were pursuing the enemy. It was his second tour of duty there and he was serving as Detachment Commander. He was buried with full military honors at Arlington National Cemetery in Arlington, Virginia. CPT Eggers is survived by his wife, Rebecca, a U.S. Army Colonel stationed at The Pentagon in Washington, D.C., two sons, John and William who are presently students at The Citadel, his parents William and Margaret, two brothers and four sisters. On 21 March 2005, the U. S. Army renamed the Combined Forces Compound in Kabul, Afghanistan – “Camp Eggers,” after Captain Daniel William Eggers. During the dedication ceremony, a plaque was unveiled honoring this American hero.

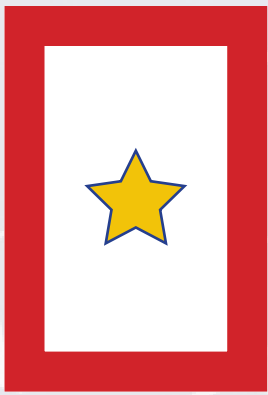


Captain Eggers was awarded the Bronze Star Medal during his first tour in Afghanistan. During his second tour, he was awarded a second Bronze Star Medal, a Bronze Star Medal with a ‘V’ device (valor) and the Purple Heart.

Danny was an accomplished and adventurous cook. He also did wonderful impressions, one of Julia Child being most memorable. His siblings said, “The party starts when Danny gets here!”

Family, friends, priests and peers used these words to describe Danny – “dedicated, intelligent, born leader, motivated and possessing both a great sense of humor and humility and the patron saint of the underdog!”





Petty Officer Second Class Jason “Jake” Moletzsky

United States Coast Guard

August 18, 1983 - October 29, 2009

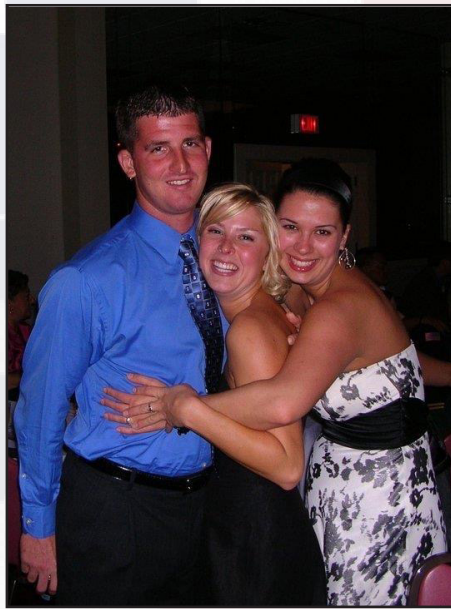


Jake was born in Norristown, Pennsylvania on August 18, 1983 to John and Lisa Moletzsky, their only son, and brother to Rebecca and Amanda. He played on various local sports teams including ice hockey. He was a graduate of Norristown Area High School, class of 2002. As a young boy, Jake was drawn to aviation guided by his father's love of flight. When a neighbor with a private plane took Jake up for a ride, he was hooked. Later in his teens, he helped that same neighbor build a custom plane in his garage. The desire to join the coast Guard was born.

Jake enlisted in the U.S. Coast Guard for a 6-year tour of duty after high school with a desire to do all things aviation. His first assignment from boot camp was the small boats at Station Miami Beach, where he became part of the team that handles search and rescue, drug interdiction, and law enforcement. His dreams to be part of the aviation was fulfilled when he was chosen to attend “A” school and became an Air Maintenance Technician in December 2004.



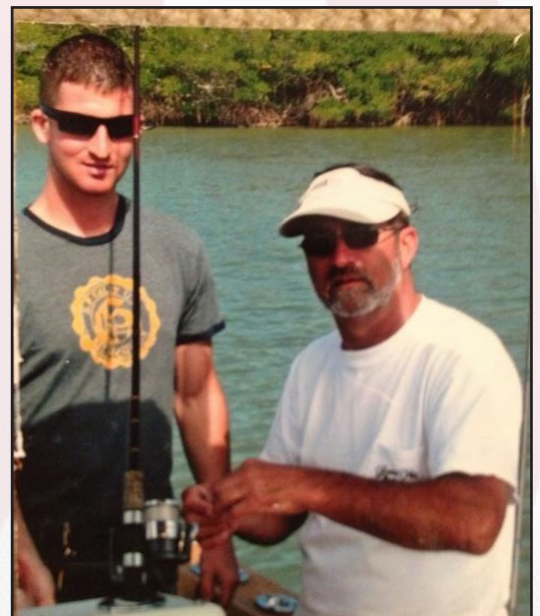
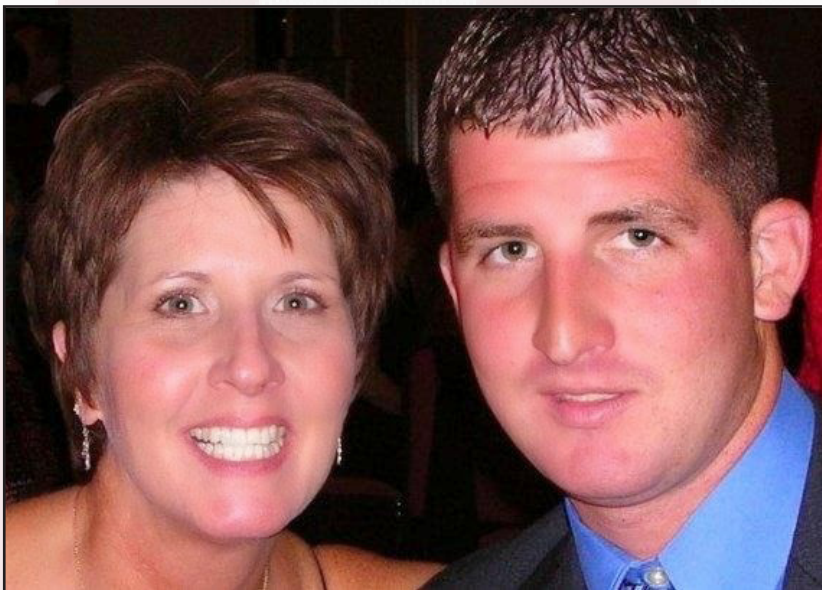
He was then transferred to USCG Air Station Miami in Opa Locka, Florida joining the team working on the Dolphin aircraft. Jake remained there until he re-enlisted and was transferred on July 1, 2009 to USCG Air Station Sacramento, California to train the C-30 Hercules aircraft. Jake quickly adapted to his new life, studying to achieve a higher rank and qualifying to be part of the mission team to work and fly on the C-130 aircraft.



On the evening of October 29, 2009, just a few weeks after passing his qualifications to be able to fly on the C-130, Jake went out on his final mission with the search and rescue team of Air Station Sacramento looking for a boater off the coast of California, near San Clemente Island. He, along with six other crew members and two Marines, lost their lives in a midair collision with a Marine Cobra helicopter that had been on a training flight in the area of the search and rescue.

Jake loved his life, his family, his girlfriend who had followed him cross-country to start this new chapter in his life, and his dog, Molly. He excelled at self-taught sports of snowboarding and ice hockey. He had a unique quality to make people love him. He was his own man, a friend who was respectful and loyal, smart and compassionate. His humor made others laugh at the best and worst of times. Jake gave up his life helping others.

We are so honored, proud and blessed to have had him in our lives! Jake was a wonderful man who loved and served his country and his family and was well loved by all.



Photos donated and story told by Lisa Moletzsky, Jake's mother



Corporal Kevin “Jack” John Dempsey

United States Marine Corps

December 9, 1980 - November 13, 2004



Cpl. Kevin John Dempsey, known as Jack to his family and friends, was born on December 9, 1980, the son of Barbara E. Dempsey and the late D. Kevin Dempsey and brother to his sister Jennifer Dempsey Carter.

Jack grew up in Greenwich, CT, graduating from Greenwich Catholic School. Throughout his formative years Jack was a gifted athlete excelling in football, baseball, swimming, basketball, ice hockey and soccer. Jack loved his friends and had a love of playing sports. Many times we would find him asleep with cleats, skates and sneakers tucked under his pillows, sport balls surrounding his bed. Jack rode a two wheel bike at the age of 3. He loved riding bikes and graduated to his beloved Mongoose BMX bike riding to his friend's homes and ballparks.

He was wise beyond his years; protecting the innocent and underdog. On the playground he demonstrated to others the knowledge of right and wrong. Jack had an extraordinary love of all animals too, rescuing those in harm's way. While on his paper route he found a stray cat, who soon became our family pet.

Jack was loving, kind and strong and wanted to make a difference with his life. He knew in the ninth grade he wanted to go into the military and was interested in becoming a USMC diver. During his high school years Jack continued to excel in sports and was awarded MVP his senior year at New Canaan High in football as starting linebacker and defensive lineman. He accomplished 3rd place in Fairfield County, CT Interscholastic wrestling.

Jack was a warm and engaging friend to all who knew him. He had a great sense of humor and loved to share his life. Graduating from New Canaan High School in 2000; he signed up with the Marine Corps Delayed Enlistment Program while attending UConn's Stamford, CT Campus.

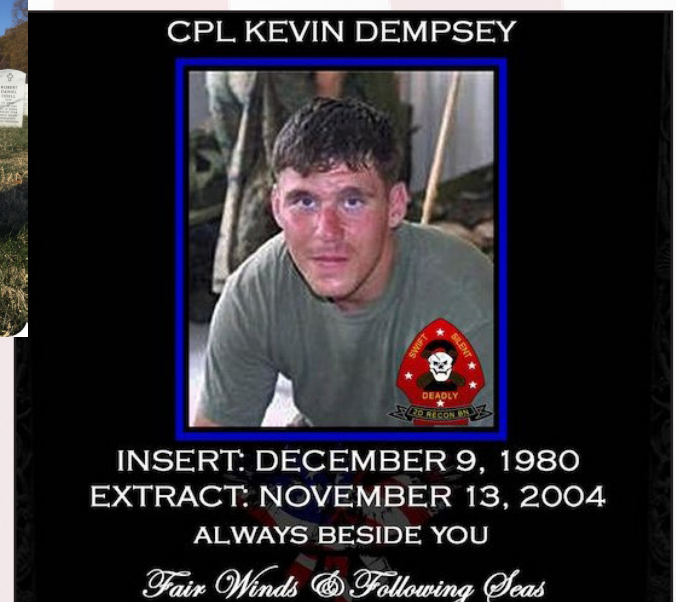


With the twin towers attacked, at 12 noon on September 11, 2001, Jack called his USMC recruiter and asked to go to basic training early as an Infantryman.

From the start at Camp Lejeune he was honored to be a Marine and was recruited to join 2nd Reconnaissance BN. Jack spent many months attending and graduated from Reconnaissance Man, Parachutist, Combatant Diver Qualified, Survival, Evasion, Resistance, Escape (SERE) School, (Brunswick, Maine) certificates. He was awarded a Purple Heart Medal and a Navy Marine Corps Commendation Medal with Combat V during his service in Operation Iraqi Freedom.

Jack loved his Marine brothers and believed he could bring about peace as a Marine. On November 13, 2004, while investigating a buried IED, as a Team Leader he was killed protecting and saving seven of his Platoon's Recon Marines.

I know he is in Heaven watching over us and continues guiding us to peace.



Photos donated and story told by Barbara Dempsey, Jack's mother



Specialist Steven Taylor Hayes

United States Army

August 23, 1990 - August 1, 2016

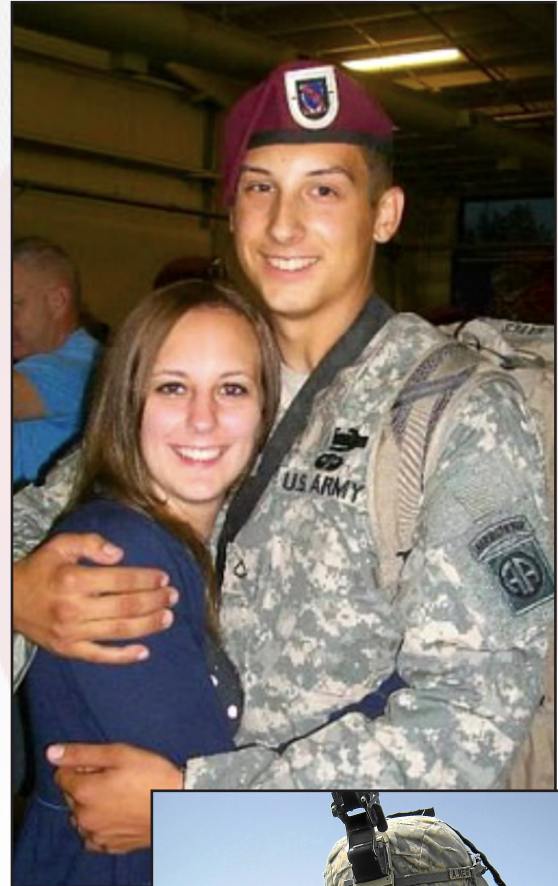
As a kid, Taylor loved the outdoors, fishing, and baseball. Once before a playoff game, Taylor told us he wasn't feeling well. The game was very close, but Taylor pitched so well that his team won. When the game ended, he walked off the field, threw up in the parking lot and had 102-degree fever by the time he got home! Even sick, he hadn't asked to be taken out of the game and had pitched the best game of his life. That was Taylor.

Taylor loved wrestling with his younger brother Graham, and joking with his little sister Spencer that any boy who wanted to date her would have to come through him first! As a college freshman in 2008, Taylor announced on Thanksgiving Day that he was going to join the Army. In what seemed like a whirlwind, he enlisted, completed Infantry and Airborne training at Ft. Benning, married his high school sweetheart Kylie, then deployed with the 82nd Airborne Division out of Ft. Bragg to a combat zone in Zabul Province, Afghanistan. He was 19 years old.

The following Thanksgiving, he survived a huge explosion when his unit was attacked by a 1,000 pound suicide truck bomber.

Mid-deployment, Taylor was able to come home for two weeks for the birth of his first baby girl, Tori. Taylor loved the outdoors, and the day before he returned to Afghanistan, he wanted to go on a family outing, so he and Kylie strolled newborn Tori around what is now Freedom Park in Naples, FL.

When Taylor returned to his Forward Operating Base in Zabul, he volunteered as a turret gunner on a forward push into Kandahar. He would often use his pitching skills to throw water bottles off the top of his turret to the little Afghani girls, whom he said received very little over there.



The day he came back to Ft. Bragg after a year in Afghanistan, he took a deep breath in and said “The air smells so clean, I call it Freedom Air!” Later that night, he looked at his father and said “Dad, I feel old.” He had just turned 20.

After Taylor was discharged, he and Kylie had another beautiful baby girl, Addy.

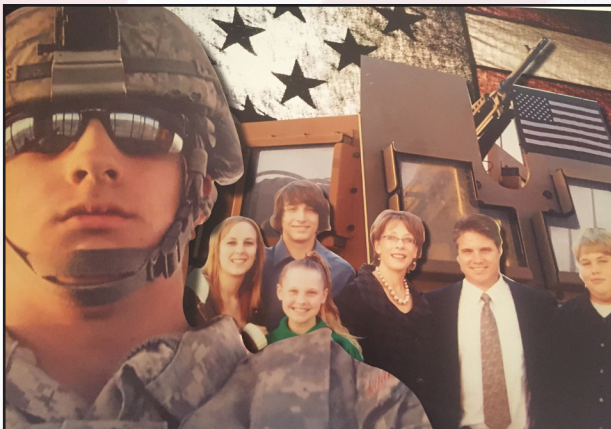
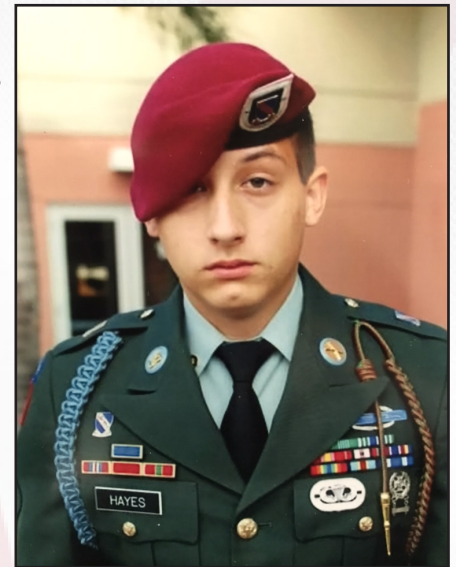
Taylor suffered from PTSD and also Traumatic Brain Injury from the explosion in Afghanistan and a parachute accident when he returned. Taylor was a courageous soldier and dedicated father who loved his family and wanted a simple life. He had a very dry sense of humor, and an impeccable work ethic, and loved “My Merica,” his family, fishing, heavy metal music, and eating!

He liked to look tough on the outside, but he was very sensitive, he even loved to grow flowers! Taylor always carried two little rocks with him that his girls had given him which said “My Dad Rocks” with their names. Sadly, Taylor passed away as a result of his service on August 1, 2016. He was 25 years old.

We ache to the core missing him, but trust the Lord daily for strength and grace til we see him again.

Taylor was most proud of his precious girls, but second to that would be earning the Combat Infantry Badge as an Airborne Infantryman with the 82nd!

SPC Steven Taylor Hayes is interred at Sarasota National Cemetery where his family visits him regularly. Memorial pavers in his honor rest front and center in front of the American Flag at Freedom Park in Naples, FL, and in front of “Iron Mike” at the Airborne and Special Operations Museum outside of Ft. Bragg in Fayetteville, NC.



Photos donated and story told by Kim Hayes, Taylor’s mother



Lance Corporal James B. Cunningham

United States Marine Corps

July 13, 1968 - November 9, 1990



James Cunningham was clearly destined to be a soldier. His mother shares that his childhood room was decorated in a red, white and blue color scheme, complete with toy soldier bedspread. James even meticulously crafted Civil War toy soldiers out of molten metal and displayed scenes depicting both the Confederate and Union sides. When he was about 15 years old, he attended a Seabees camp in San Diego, California through his JROTC program in Phoenix. James was so righteous that he chose not to take any additional spending money. When he arrived in San Diego, however, he realized that everyone had spending money but him! James made a long-distance call to his mom relaying the problem. James' mom did what any good mother would do, she called the Base Commander's wife. The next morning, when everyone assembled at Reveille, the Commander called James forward, and handed him an envelope and said "This is from your Mommy!"



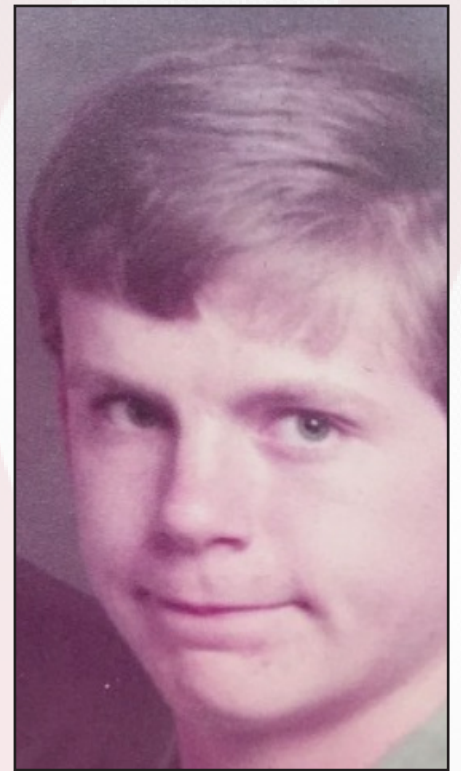
James was selfless, and it showed. While in high school, he volunteered to work at homeless shelters and donated to those in need from his own money. As a teenager, he loved hiking the Grand Canyon and did so several times. He was also very athletic, and lettered in track and football in high school. James B. Cunningham secured his enlistment in the United States Marine Corps prior to his graduation from Bourgade Catholic High School, in Phoenix, Arizona.



In June of 1987, James was assigned to the Marine Depot Center in San Diego, California for boot camp, and later trained at historic Parris Island, Camp Lejeune, and Quantico Marine Corps Bases. He served at the renowned Marine Barracks Washington D.C. also known as “8th and I”. The Barracks supports both ceremonial and security missions in the nation’s capital and is home to many nationally recognized Marine Units, including the Silent Drill Platoon and the official Marine Band Color Guard. During that time, James served as one of President Reagan’s honor guards during the George H.W. Bush inauguration. After three years there as an accountant, he interestingly transferred to Marine Reconnaissance. Because of his color blindness, he was trained as a sniper.

James then went to several Southeast Asia stations, including a lengthy assignment with the Thai Marines. Later, James’ unit from Kaneohe Bay, Hawaii was one of the first to be deployed, in August of 1990, to Saudi Arabia in preparation for the Desert Storm War. James was tragically killed in a friendly fire incident in Saudi Arabia on November 9, 1990. James dearly loved his sister, Beth, who had amazingly taken her Marine Corps oath the week before his death, but was allowed to stay with her grieving family.

One story that lives on in James’s family is of the time when his recruiters trusted him to carry enlistment orders to boot camp from Phoenix. Once on the plane he realized that he had given those orders to his dad! Due to a very kind pilot, James was able to obtain the documents.



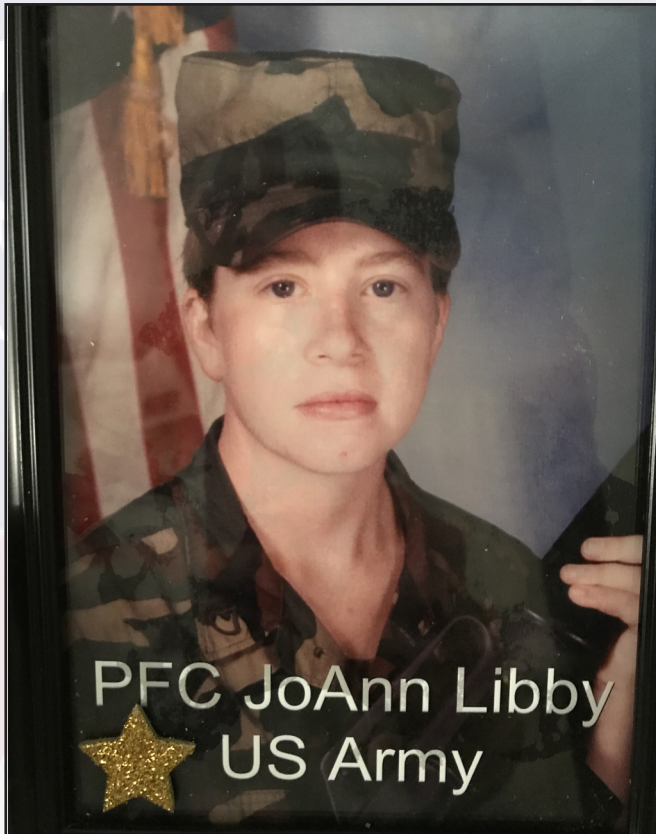
Story, as told by Julia Cunningham, James’ mother, to:
Through Their Eyes: The Community School of Naples Veteran Project, 2019.



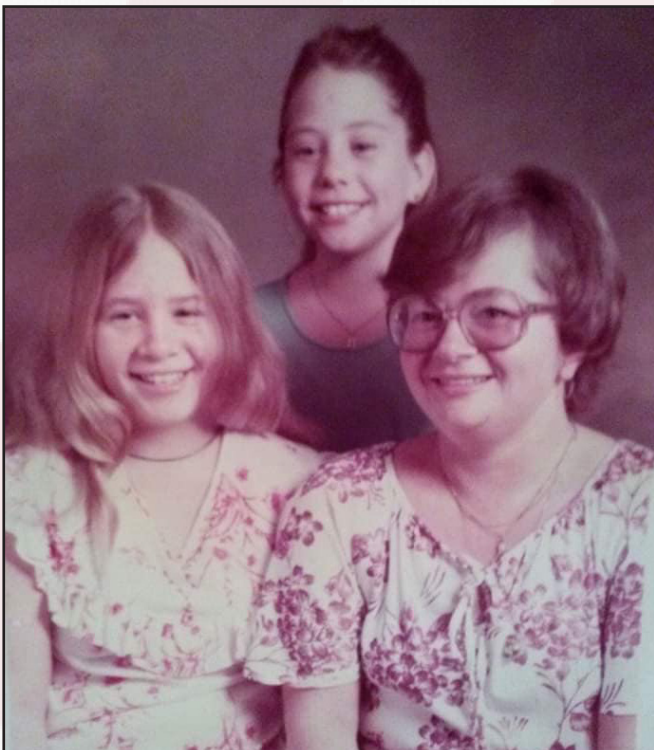
Private First Class Jo-Ann Elizabeth Libby

United States Army

January 17, 1967 - August 26, 2005



I never met Jo-Ann Libby. In fact, before this project I had never heard of her; however, as my paint brush's strokes began to compile, Jo-Ann's story became one that only I knew. I didn't need to know her physical story to realize the sacrifices she made. The freedom I take for granted on a daily basis isn't assured, but protected because of people like her. I didn't need to know her story to realize that. What I didn't know was the importance of differentiating between realizing and understanding. I had realized the importance of service; however, hearing Jo-Ann's story allowed me to understand the bravery and passion required. Jo-Ann Libby didn't serve for fame or fortune, but because of her undeniable devotion toward the United States of America. Her legacy deserves to inspire more people like me, who realize the importance of service but have never taken the time to understand its depth.



Jo-Ann Libby was born in 1967 and was the oldest of two girls. JoAnn loved her mom, Shirley Libby, and was a good kid, as she did what she was told to do. In high school, she joined JROTC and in her senior year was recognized with the Superior Cadet Decoration Award. This award is given for demonstrating officer potential. Not only did she participate in JROTC, but also performed in the marching band, playing the clarinet and tenor sax. These activities show her dedication and determination, because they are both physically and emotionally demanding.

Jo-Ann's grandfather served in WWII, contributing to her desire to join the military. It wasn't long after high school, at the age of twenty years old, that Jo-Ann Libby officially enlisted. She joined the Army and started training in New Jersey at Fort Dix. Unfortunately, early in her training, Jo-Ann injured her leg. Initially, the wound seemed like a minor set-back to her and she would be back to training in no time to serve her country. After a week of recovery, however, the wound wasn't healing and she was diagnosed with a blood infection, which eventually led to her untimely death.

Jo-Ann Libby was far more than just devoted to her country; she was studious, quiet, responsible, and brave. When I asked Jo-Ann's mom about how she felt about her daughter's painting and biography being forever a part of the portrait book, she responded, "I am proud of her and happy that people will remember her." This book has the power to give people like Jo-Ann a legacy that will last forever. Even as people come and go, their legacies will not. "A hero is someone who has given his or her life to something bigger than oneself." –Joseph Campbell. Now I understand. Thank you, Jo-Ann Libby, for being an inspiration.



Private Benjamin M. Praeger

United States Army

May 8, 1910 - November 3, 1944

Benjamin Praeger was born in Zborow, Poland and married Lottie Praeger in Vienna in 1935. They were still living there at the time of the Nazi "Anschluss" in 1938. Arrested by the Gestapo, they spent seven months in the Nazi concentration camp at Buchenwald. They were released in June 1939 and made their way first to England then to the United States in August 1940.

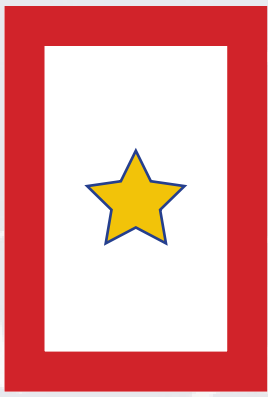


Drafted into the US Army on August 7, 1944, Pvt. Praeger received his basic training at Fort Mclellan, Alabama and was sent overseas in August 1944. He landed in England and went with the First Army through France and Belgium. He was a private in the Infantry.

In November 1944 Private Benjamin Praeger was killed in Action while serving with the U.S. Army Infantry in Aachen, Germany.

At the time of his death, Benjamin Praeger was the father of Shirley Praeger who turned one-year-old the day after his death serving in World War II.

Shirley Praeger Libby is the mother of Jo-Ann Libby, making her both a Gold Star Daughter and a Gold Star Mother.



Staff Sergeant Marc Anthony Scialdo

United States Army

July 22, 1981 - March 11, 2013

Marc moved to Naples, Florida when he was three years old. He was very active as a child, showing a fondness for hunting, fishing, and playing baseball. His mother said that he was “A sweet and gentle soul. He was funny, loving, and always fun to be around. Everybody loved him.” He attended St. Elizabeth Seton School, and then went on to St. John Neumann where he graduated in 1999.

After high school, Marc went on to Edison Community College in Naples where he studied for two years while trying to choose a career path. Then came 9/11/2001. Two airplanes crashed into the Twin Towers in New York City. Incredibly, for the duration of this fatal attack, Marc’s sister was trapped in the Ronald Reagan Building in D.C. After that nightmarish day, Marc decided to join the military to protect his family and his country.

Marc Scialdo served in the United States Army for ten years, obtaining the rank of Staff Sergeant. He was a crew chief on a UH-60 helicopter, also known as a Blackhawk. During his impressive career, Marc was stationed in Korea, Iraq, and Afghanistan. Marc was a brave man, always putting others first. He was caring, selfless, and embodied the best of all that it meant to be an American hero. Staff Sergeant Marc Scialdo lost his life on March 11, 2013 due to a helicopter crash during a night training mission in Kandahar, Afghanistan.



“Marc had the best sense of humor and often brought that out when he hit the dance floor at a wedding or went out with his friends, and even in the hangar with his crew while deployed! Some of our favorite stories are from his fellow soldiers, saying how he would often make up a dance and sing hit songs from pop stars like Katie Perry or Justin Timberlake. We have photos of him doing this on his base or in the hangar while taking a break from his flight mechanic work. Marc always had a huge smile on his face, embracing and loving life.” Marc’s sister, Jackie Nelson.



Story, as told by Jackie Nelson, Marc’s sister to
Through Their Eyes: The Community School of Naples Veteran Project, 2019.



Lance Corporal Marc Leeland Plotts

United States Marine Corps
May 7, 1989 - March 30, 2010



“Marc with a C” – this is one of the first ways he made sure you know that he is special. It only takes a few moments with him to realize that he is so much more than that little letter. Marc Leeland Plotts was born on Marine Corps Air Ground Combat Station (MCAGCC), 29 Palms, CA on 7 May 1989 and had three passions, his family and friends, his music, and the United States Marine Corps.

Marc was born into a family of service and he was confident of who he wanted to be and where he wanted to serve. His grandfather, great uncle, and parents are all Marines (including me, his mom!) and his stepfather is a retired police officer. Service was in his blood. The family jokes that he said Marine Corps before he said Mom and he slept under a Marine Corps blanket from the day he moved out of his crib.



Marc was the youngest of four boys but his brothers, Kyle, Gary, and Doug, never treated him like a baby brother. Doug was his best friend. They were inseparable as children and into adulthood, and when you get the two of them together there is always a plan, scheme or idea in the works. Kyle was someone to look up to and laugh with. Marc could not contain his excitement when he was asked to be Kyle's Best Man, he said it was his last official act as a civilian. Gary is a big brother in every sense of the word. Someone to look up to, share secrets, or find out what will make Mom really angry or laugh out loud.

Photos donated and story told by Lee-Ann Forsythe, Marc's mother



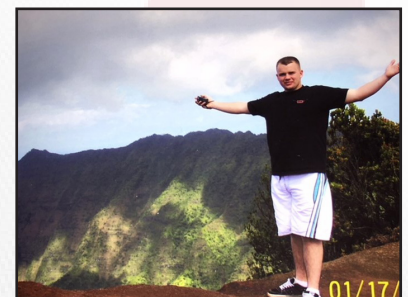
Unlike many children who go thru phases when they don't want to spend time with adults, Marc NEVER did. Marc and Mom days were special. Just the two of us. Museums, concerts, shows, Disney, dinners...It was our time to talk about everything – plans, silly stories, secrets, and our lives. He held my hand, wrapped his arms around me and said, “I love you Momma Bear.” But for the important things in life, Marc went to Buzz. Learning how to drive, discussing the merits of the best weapons, how to talk to girls, and all the things that make Mom worry. He just smiles and says, “Buzz understands.”

If you call Marc friend, he took that honor very seriously. No matter the distance or the last time you talked to him, it would never occur to him that you are anything but his friend. He would collect friends like pebbles. From the time he could talk he would meet people everywhere we went, from the grocery store to the airport and everywhere in between. He was interested in everyone and wanted to hear their stories. As we moved around the country from California to Pennsylvania and Florida to Virginia, Marc took his friends with him and always kept in touch. Even from Iraq, after the fall of Saddam Hussein he sent everyone a piece of defunct paper money. He wanted each of his friends and family to be a part of his experiences.

As a small child Marc quickly learned the effect that music can have on your life and he listened to everything from Country to Metal, Oldies to Punk. He played bass and guitar, sang, and wrote music. He had a song for every occasion and was constantly singing or playing a virtual drum beat to the music in his head.

The United States Marine Corps is Marc's first and true love. He never considered another path for his life. He swelled with pride when he talked about the opportunity to make a difference in the lives of others. He became part of an elite Brotherhood with all the Pride and Dedication that only a Marine can fully understand. Honor, Courage, Commitment is not a motto, it is a way of life for LCpl Marc Leeland Plotts.

To quote Marc's favorite verse of the Marines' Hymn:
Here's health to you and to our Corps Which we are proud to serve;
In many a strife we've fought for life And never lost our nerve;
If the Army and the Navy Ever look on Heaven's scenes;
They will find the streets are guarded By UNITED STATES MARINES.”
In Marc's own words: “I am a crazy dude and I love to have fun. End of story.”





WO2 Aaron Healy

ARMY

03/18/1991-03/29/2023

Aaron, a cherished son, soldier, and loving husband and father, was born and raised in the warm embrace of Cape Coral, FL. From his early days, Aaron's adventurous spirit and passion for camaraderie were evident. When he was little, Aaron's enthusiasm for sports blossomed as he played t-ball and then football for The Storms in Cape Coral. However, it was his discovery of paintball in middle school that ignited a passion.



With paintball as his "all-time favorite sport," Aaron eagerly immersed himself in weekend challenges. He even talked us into taking him on a trip during the hottest time of the year for a weekend paintball challenge in the woods where each team had to try and capture the flag of the other, and they were allowed to take prisoners. They stayed out all night in the "war". While we were sweating and trying to sleep in our tents, he was out in the woods with his team working on how to capture victory's flag from the other team.

An avid lover of the great outdoors, Aaron reveled in family camping trips, fishing excursions, and the company of animals. His childhood dream of becoming a veterinarian reflected his compassionate nature, evident in his care for his numerous pets, including a goldfish, a hamster, a parakeet, cockatiels, and a spirited Jack Russell. He would put on his rollerblades and have his dog pull him around the neighborhood. They both had a lot of fun together.

Aaron's palate mirrored his zest for life. From childhood sushi cravings to later savoring a succulent steak accompanied by a sweet potato covered in sour cream, his culinary journey mirrored his evolving tastes and adventurous spirit.

Graduating from Ida Baker High School in 2009, Aaron embarked on a path toward mechanical engineering at FIT in Melbourne. Although his initial dreams shifted due to unforeseen circumstances, Aaron's unwavering determination led him to enlist in the Army in 2010, where he found his calling.

During his thirteen years of service, Aaron exemplified resilience and versatility. From his initial role as a wheeled vehicle mechanic to that of a teacher and later, a Blackhawk pilot, Aaron's dedication and adaptability shone brightly. Stationed across various locales, including Fort Campbell, Virginia, Alaska, and Alabama, Aaron's service took him to Afghanistan twice, where his bravery and commitment to duty were unwavering.

Beyond his military service, Aaron found profound joy in family life, marrying and raising two beautiful daughters. Together, they embarked on countless adventures, creating cherished memories filled with laughter and love. Aaron's warmth and magnetic personality endeared him to a vast circle of friends and family, leaving a lasting mark on all who knew him.

Though Aaron's time with us was tragically cut short, his legacy of courage, compassion, and camaraderie lives on, a testament to the remarkable person he was and the profound impact he made on all who had the privilege of knowing him.

Story as told by his Mother, Vicki Healy



Private Charlie Anthony

ARMY

02/28/1946 – 05/12/1969

Vietnam

Looking for a change from share cropping in southeastern Alabama, L C and Daisy May Anthony moved to the Naples Florida area in 1953 where they raised 8 children. Charlie had 3 sisters and four brothers. He attended school at Carver Elementary in Naples and graduated from Carver High School in 1965.

Drafted into the Army in 1968, after completion of his basic training, he received his orders for Vietnam, arriving 27 August 1968. On 12 May 1969, his unit engaged the enemy in action near Zuan Than, approximately 8 Kilometers South Southeast of Duc Pho.

With complete disregard for his personal safety, he attacked and killed several of the enemy. When PFC Anthony and the remainder of his squad tried to prevent the enemy soldiers from skirting the flank of their position, a firefight ensued that caused Anthony to be fatally wounded. His family was presented his Silver and Bronze Stars and Purple Heart, among his other medals. He was married and had a daughter that he never met. In 1976, the City of Naples named a park in his honor.

C Company, 3/1st Infantry, lost 10 men on 12 May 1969 in a firefight about 9 kilometers south-southeast of Duc Pho. They were:

- **[SFC Bertalan James Toth](#), San Francisco, California**
- **[SSG Kenneth Lee Brinks](#), Cadillac, Michigan**
- **[SGT Robert William Compton](#), Pacifica, California**
- **[SP4 Hugh Pinson Caldwell](#), Detroit, Michigan**
- **[SP4 Larry Lee Thomure](#), Ste Genevieve, Missouri**
- **[SP4 Alberto Rios Vasquez](#), Orange Grove, Texas**
- **[PFC Charlie C. Anthony](#), Naples, Florida**
- **[PFC Peter Philip Dubiel](#), Bristol, Connecticut**
- **[PFC James Ralph Stevenson](#), Tupelo, Mississippi**
- **[PFC Isaiah Truman Stukes](#), Summerton, South Carolina**

At the time of his death, Charlie was survived by his wife Laura F Anthony and parents, Daisy Mae (1918-2004) and L. C. Anthony (1917-1984), all of Naples, Florida and his brothers and sisters. PFC Anthony is buried in Naples Memorial Gardens, North Naples Florida, along with his mother and father. As of 2012, two of his sisters, both retired teachers and two brothers, one a retired firefighter, live in the Naples area. Willie lives in the River Park community and has supported the neighborhood for over 50 years.

**Charlie C. Anthony Private First Class
C CO, 3RD BN, 1ST INFANTRY, 11TH INFANTRY BDE,
AMERICAL DIV, USARV
Army of the United States**

[Naples, Florida](#)

February 28, 1946 to May 12, 1969

[CHARLIE C ANTHONY](#) is on the Wall at [Panel W25, Line 59](#)



Sgt. Philip Kesler
United States Air Force
12/29/1967- 10/29/1992

Philip was a USAF Flight Engineer, 55th Special Operations Squadron. It was about two weeks before Veteran's Day in 1992 that Katy Errington received the news every military mom fears: Her son had been killed.

Sgt. Philip Kesler was just two months shy of his 25th birthday when his helicopter went down during a training exercise over the Great Salt Lake in Utah. He was a flight engineer with a special operations unit of the U.S. Air Force who enlisted right after graduating high school.

“He loved his job so much, he said to me, ‘Mom, they even pay me to do this!’” recalled Errington, who was working as a curriculum supervisor for a school district in Ohio at the time. “He loved what he was doing; he loved the camaraderie, being with that squadron and the things he got to do.”

Sgt. Kesler served in the Air Force for six years, including a tour in northern Iraq and eastern Turkey. As part of Operation Provide Comfort, he helped distribute medicine, clothing, food and shelter to Kurdish refugees. A few months before his death, he assisted in a flight rescue following an avalanche.

“He did so much in such a short amount of time,” his mom, Katy said. “He was destined to do what he did.”

As a way of honoring her son, Errington started a nonprofit, Philip’s Granary, which provided comfort to children living in poverty around the globe. She partnered with Penn State Professor James Kalsbeek to develop a coloring book which featured an airman who flew all over the world in a helicopter and handed out “gifts that can’t be purchased,” like love, joy and kindness. Working with Rotary International, Errington distributed the coloring books to more than 60,000 children living in war zones, orphanages and refugee camps, along with children in hospitals and abuse shelters in the United States.

From this spun Children Without, an initiative which provided scholarships for children in Puerto Vallarta,

Mexico, to attend school.

“This was for kids who lived in a garbage dump,” Errington explained. “It has been so successful they give 400 scholarships a year now. There are so many kids that have been touched by that.”

"He was very kind and loving and caring." She recalls a story about Philip organizing a candy drop for refugee children on Halloween.

Errington said. "It was such a tragedy for his young life to be taken so soon."

Yet, her message meant to be uplifting. As someone who knows the pride and the pain of military families, Errington aims to honor those who have fought, and continue to fight, for our nation's freedom.



LCPL Thomas P Echols

USMC

01/02/1986 – 12/6/2006

Tom was born on January 2, 1986 in Mt. Clemens, MI. He attended Bullitt Central High School where he was a part of the school's Army Junior ROTC and drill team and graduated from Riverview High School in 2004. He was assigned to the 1st Battalion, 6th Marine Regiment, 2nd Marine Division, I II Marine Expeditionary Force stationed in Camp Lejeune, NC. He is survived by his wife, the former Allyson Salyer; his parents, Kurt and Rose Echols of Naples, FL; his sister, Becca Miller; and brother, Alex Echols, both of Shepherdsville; his grandparents, Jerry and Sharon Echols of Sierra Vista, AZ, and Donald and Mary Wight of Algonac, MI; and his great-grandmothers, Eleanor Hoffman of Seattle, WA, and Zella Wight of Lansing, MI.

Some people say that their love was love at first sight. Tom and I aren't like everyone else. We met at a party in January 2004 that was for a mutual friend. He came off as the complete opposite as what I was looking for in a boyfriend, he was wild and crazy, assertive and had just joined the Marines and was scheduled to go to boot camp in a few months. I was 17 and he just turned 18 both of us not looked for much out of a teenage romance. We were complete opposites in every way, it actually took Tom a week to even convince me to go on a date with him. After that first date it was all said and done. We were going to be together forever. Since we did come from such different backgrounds people didn't give us much of a chance, but we were fighters we stuck it

out through boot camp, SOI and Tom being stationed 700 miles away at Camp LeJeune. I started my senior year of High School with Tom working up to his first deployment. While Tom was home for Christmas leave he asked me to marry him and I said yes. Then in March 2005, Tom was deployed to Fallujah, Iraq for 7 months. Those were some of the toughest 7 months of my life.

When he came home in October is one of the happiest I can ever remember. I started attending a small private college. Tom accepted a temporary place in the local recruitment center where he would be home for a month on recruiting duty. So on November 21, 2005 he randomly shows up on campus and we go to the court house to get married only to turn the circuit clerk judge was out for the day. We were bummed at first but then found out that the justice of the peace would marry us if we went to his barbor shop. So we walked to his barbor and got married. After my school ended in May I moved to North Carolina to be with Tom. That summer is still to this day my favorite summer of all time. Tom was scheduled to deploy again in September.

On August 31, 2006 we found out that I was pregnant, due May 12, 2007. Then on September 6, Tom left for Ramadi, Iraq. That was the hardest day of my life. Watching him step on that bus was the most pain I have ever been in. I moved back home to stay with family while Tom was in Iraq, then during the early morning hours of December 5 I got the dreaded knock on the door, Tom had been killed the day before while on post.

May 16, I gave birth to our beautiful little (Tom Jr) girl, weighing 8 pounds 8 ounces,
As told by his widow Allyson Echols



Capt. William Branch

ARMY

07/11/1941 – 06/06/1970

Wedding date: Nov. 11, 1963
to Judy Dunn

When she told the story, my mother's face would always flush. They had met in 1960 at a military college where my dad was a company CO. And when he first laid eyes on her, mama was wearing a tight sweater, walking with all the freshmen girls. At once, Daddy called his company to attention and shouted in his best military cadence, "Gentlemen, eyes right! I will be marrying that red sweater!" And the whole of the drill field erupted in laughter.

And sure enough, before they graduated, he asked for her hand on Crown Mountain. They were married just 7 years before the war took him.

Born in Fitzgerald, GA, the only child of Maggie and Rusty Branch, Dad was a self-taught artist, and he sold political cartoons to the local paper to help pay for school. He accepted Christ at a Vacation Bible School when he was 8 and came home to lead both his parents to the Lord. Dad was a 1959 graduate of Georgia Military Academy, in College Park, Georgia; and a 1963 graduate of the University of North Georgia in Dahlonega, Georgia. He commissioned Army Infantry in 1963, served as a MACV advisor with the 2 BN, 46ARVN Infantry, Team 86 and Team 99 and returned to Georgia as a Professor of Military Science at Gordon Military College in Barnesville in 1967. During his second combat tour, in 1969, Dad was as an intelligence officer with the 2/14th INF 25 DIV. Killed 10 days before he was due home, we buried him on Father's Day of 1970, at the old cemetery in Ft. Moore, Georgia.

Still today his men call him the Good Captain. They say he spoke Vietnamese fluently and led from in front. His commander recounts, "With his artist's eye, Bill drew detailed maps and sketches that helped put a severe dent in the NVA." Dad had studied military leadership and history in school. He was proud to fight against the spread of communism. He wrote home, "many of these children have never had a new box of crayons or cold ice cream to eat. It is right that we should try to make a better life for them."

Captain William Anderson Branch is father I can be proud of. He left behind a wife who longed for him another 40 years. I miss them both.

More info: VirtualWall.org and at Goldstarchildren.org



By Jennifer Branch Denard