

Daren

by Tony Formica

I found out about the death of Daren Hidalgo about five minutes after my battalion rolled back in from The Box at NTC, and at the time, prevailing over all of the initial shock and instinctive sadness, I was left in a state of not really knowing what came next. Over the course of the next couple days, after every conversation and every good time I'd ever had with Daren had been played and replayed in high-definition in my memory, that original sense of uncertainty metastasized into more understandable, thought-out, and concrete emotions--loss and sorrow being chief among them--but the same uncertainty was still there. What follows in the wake of such a buoyant, happy person's light fading away?

Daren was an acquaintance at West Point, became a friend in BOLC II, a better friend in IBOLC, and was a mutual sufferer during Ranger School. It is neither a disservice nor an exaggeration to say that he was always smiling, a virtue not lost on one who rarely smiles. Regardless of the circumstances, in spite of the suck factor, and, sometimes, against all reason and logic, Daren Hidalgo always found a way to laugh off the nonsense that so often prevails in the Army and find cause to grin. He was the prototypical Spartan who saw a fight in the shade when the rest of us saw thousands of arrows, and the influence of his good humor on those of us around him can best be expressed by the simple fact that, after all the cold rains and nights without sleep, Fort Benning remains a happy memory for us. Reasonable people wouldn't retain such memories; Soldiers who worked with Daren Hidalgo cherish them.

Some people might feel that Daren's death was a waste of a great young man. That attitude is a disservice to the memory I have of the type of person Daren was. It is doubly true that Daren would have probably gone far in the Army and done much to make it a better, more effective organization. But to spend time ruminating on the potentialities of a future that will not be is to tarnish the certain good that exists in what Daren did manage to do with his life--a life that, no matter which way you slice it, was well-spent. Those of us who are around in 50 years will still associate Daren Hidalgo with smiling, with making our profession more tolerable, and with making life more enjoyable.

Well done, Daren; Be Thou at Peace.