

# DAREN HIDALGO

By Benjamin Niehoff <benjamin.niehoff@gmail.com 3/1/2011 12:20 AM

"Duty, honor, country: Those three hallowed words reverently dictate what you ought to be, what you shall be, what you will be. They are your rallying point to build courage when courage seems to fail, to regain faith when there seems to be little cause for faith, to create hope when hope becomes forlorn." My friend, Daren Hidalgo lived these words from General MacArthur's address to the Corps of Cadets more than anyone I have ever met. Daren sincerely believed in this simple motto.

In the four years I spent with him at the Academy I never saw him lose faith in the institution that was preparing us to be leaders in the profession of arms. Even when others were giving in to the cynicism of cadet life that leads us to bemoan our foolish choice to attend West Point, and later our even more foolish decision to stay after the start of our Cow Year, Daren would vehemently argue that we were all doing the right thing. I can still see his disapproving and slightly disappointed face as he would look at one of us in the midst of a rant about how the only possible way out of Physics was to walk to the Bear Mountain Bridge and leap into the Hudson. "You don't really mean that," he would say while looking at you with a face that made you feel like continuing to criticize the Academy would be a personal attack on Daren. "I guess not," you would mumble. Daren's face would immediately light up into that ear to ear grin. "I told you so, now let's go and steal all of the Firsties laundry and put it in SFC Rogers' office!" or some other random prank that would leave you laughing just as much as he was. Daren had an infectious enthusiasm that you could not help but catch if you were around him. This enthusiasm was displayed in all aspects of his life from sports, to military leadership, to academics ... maybe not as much in academics.

I don't honestly know how Daren passed the three semesters of English

required at the Academy. Through all three of these English classes I was the editor of many of Daren's papers. He would email them to me, I would go through them and correct any spelling or grammar deficiencies that I found, and then I would go looking for him to talk about content. I learned quickly to ask when the paper was due. The usual response was, "About 20 minutes. Is there anything I need to fix?" To which I would pause and then respond, "No Daren, everything looks fine." If we had more than 20 minutes I would sit down with him and explain why run on sentences were bad and flow between paragraphs was important. Either way, Daren would cheerfully proceed to turn in his paper, confident that this time he was going to get an A.

I don't think Daren ever got an A in English. Where Daren did earn many A's was in his military grades. These are the grades assigned to a Cadet for their military performance, first as a subordinate and then as a leader. Daren was one of the most professional leaders I have ever encountered in my nine years in the military. He took responsibility for his decisions and enforced these decisions with subordinates, peers, and superiors. . Daren was not afraid to argue with his leadership if he disagreed with their decisions. However, Daren was also a professional and when given an order would take ownership of it and not pawn off the responsibility on "those jerks from higher." Daren and I frequently butted heads over this point, especially our senior year under the "reign of terror" of the first semester with MAJ Shah (Haha Sir!). I never once won one of these arguments. But you couldn't stay mad at Daren long, he would come find you sulking at the Firstie Club, buy you a beer, and say, "Hey let's go put the Plebe's laundry in SFC Roger's office!" And despite how mad you thought you were, you, would laugh, and follow Daren off on the next adventure he had cooked up.

Daren was taken from us too soon, and we all feel his absence. It is a bitter reminder that this country we love and this freedom we cherish are bought at a great price. Too often that price is the lives of some of our finest young men and women. My friend, 1LT Daren M. Hidalgo, laid down his life defending his family,

his friends, and his country. The Bible says that, "Greater love hath no man than this that he lay down his life for a friend." I cannot think of a better testament to Daren. Our friend has crossed the river, and one day we will as well. I know that when I do I will see Daren's smile welcoming me to the other side and that Heaven is a happier place than it was before because he is there. Well done Daren, be thou at peace.