

DAREN HIDALGO BY DIANA DUKE 2/28/2011

I still can't get over Daren being gone. I'm used to battle tracking and seeing reports of WIA and KIA but nothing affected me because it didn't hit so close to home. The good thing is that every time I think of Daren, I've always had happy thoughts. For some odd reason, that's the imprint he has left on this world. I have a smile on my face when I think of Daren because he's the guy that always somehow can put a smile on people's face even if it is in memories. He has had such positive effect on people that we can't help but smile. He definitely was someone that didn't take life for granted. We can always remember him by his smile, outgoing personality, and a jokester. At the same time, when it came down to business ... he was determined, intelligent, and excelled in everything he did.

He was the most amazing and talented racquetball player ever! It is always so much fun to watch him on the court as he dove for every ball. Have you ever had the opportunity to watch him on the court? Daren was very very impressive to watch! He was well loved by all that knew him the world is at a great loss...I know how much he admires you especially after working with you as CO Commander. I still remember when we were all hating life our Firstie year when you came and Daren was like don't worry, I'll work with him. I'll fight for the company.

I'm coping and learning how to accept not only the fact that one of my close friends was killed in the line of duty, but also that this is an inherent risk of our lives. God saved Larkin and still saved Daren, but in a different way. The bigger picture is simply:

- Cherish the memories.
- Honor the memories.
- Lean on your Family and Friends.
- And live and grow-trusting that God is in control whether we understand anything at all.

Daren and I were quite the pair as CO/XO of G-4 our Firstie Year. We all started out together as New Cadets back in 2005 and truly bonded as some of the closest (and yet oh so different) Guppies at the Academy. Although Daren and I had very different leadership philosophies and yes ... may have gotten into a few fights like any CO and XO do ... we were a team. The memories come flooding back even over here in Afghanistan where death is a part of life and our job. Despite eight months into the deployment here, Daren has reminded me. We will always be brothers and sisters in arms no matter the time and distance. The Gups are coming together once more ... in Afghanistan, Iraq, and America ... at West Point and around the world.

His infectious laugh, smile, and spirit live on as we grieve for him. I love him like a brother. May God Bless Daren's entire Family and all of us.

1LT Diana M. Duke