

MILWAUKEE JOURNAL SENTINEL

Youngest son in military family lived to serve



(BACK ROW) Dad Jorge, mom Andrea, Daren who was killed in Action February 20, 2011, in Afghanistan. (FRONT ROW) Jared (Marines), Carmen, Miles (West Point grad who escorted his brother's body home). This photo from the fall of 2007 was the last time the entire Hidalgo family was together due to deployments. Miles has had four deployments. Jared two with the Marines. Daren was on his first deployment when he was killed in Afghanistan. ----- Hidalgo family photo



Army 1st Lt. Daren M. Hidalgo

Lieutenant killed in Afghanistan had remained with unit despite earlier IED injury

By [Meg Jones](#) of the Journal Sentinel
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Waukesha — When Army officers and a chaplain knocked at the home of Jorge and Andrea Hidalgo, they knew the worst had happened.

What they didn't know - which son?

All three sons in the Hidalgo family are serving our country, two West Point graduates stationed in Afghanistan and a Marine stationed at Camp Pendleton.

The Army officers told them gently that it was Daren, the youngest of the family's three boys. A 2009 West Point graduate, 1st Lt. Daren Hidalgo was serving his first deployment in Afghanistan, and as a platoon commander in a Stryker Cavalry Regiment he was known for his leadership and care of his men. In fact, he had been wounded in an IED attack two weeks before his Feb. 20 death but refused to leave his soldiers to seek treatment for shrapnel wounds to his thigh.

Instead he took antibiotics and joked to his father via e-mail that he now set off metal detectors.

He said "Dad, if I have surgery I'll be away from my men. It could be two weeks or six weeks," Jorge Hidalgo said at his Waukesha home Tuesday morning. "It's ironic. If he had come out (for medical treatment) we wouldn't be preparing a funeral."

Army Capt. Miles Hidalgo, 26, had just returned from a mission when told his commander wanted to see him. When he saw the chaplain he knew it was bad news. Miles and Daren had talked and e-mailed each other in Afghanistan but hadn't managed

to see each other. Daren Hidalgo was supposed to meet with his brother the day before he was killed, but a last-minute change in mission canceled the reunion.

Miles Hidalgo flew to Dover Air Force Base, where he met his brother's casket and escorted it to Waukesha. A 2006 West Point graduate, Miles Hidalgo will give a eulogy at his brother's funeral Wednesday at St. Anthony on the Lake Catholic Church in Pewaukee.

"I was never really worried about him. Every time we talked, I'd say: 'Stay safe.' Daren had taken his job very seriously and was prepared," said Miles Hidalgo, who will return to his unit in Afghanistan after his brother's funeral.

Revenge is not something Miles Hidalgo thinks about. There's no desire to avenge his brother's death but to continue his mission and ultimately try to make Afghanistan a country where bombs no longer explode.

"The sad truth is it's about economics over there," said Miles Hidalgo, who is on his fourth Afghan deployment. "I'm not really angry at the person who dug the hole and put the IED in. It was probably some poor guy who did it to get paid. If anything it's renewed my sense of purpose over there. Politics really doesn't come into play - you make sure the guys on the left and right of you survive."

Son of Harley executive

The family moved quite a bit as the three boys and their younger sister, Carmen, grew up. Jorge Hidalgo was an executive at Harley-Davidson and worked at the plants in York, Pa., and in Milwaukee. Daren Hidalgo was born at Eglin Air Force Base in Florida and attended Wales Elementary School and Kettle Moraine middle and high schools before finishing high school in Pennsylvania.

His oldest brother Jared Hidalgo was best friends at Kettle Moraine High School with Rich Warner. Both joined the Marines on the same day, Warner choosing to enlist and Jared Hidalgo going through officer training while studying at the University of Wisconsin-Madison. When Warner was sent to Iraq in 2004 with his Milwaukee-based Marine Reserves unit, Daren Hidalgo and his sister organized their high school classmates to send letters and care packages.

Warner joked with his family that he got more care packages, containing better items, from Daren Hidalgo's school than he got from his own family, said Warner's stepfather, Pat Donahue. The two families were close because of the friendship between Warner and Jared Hidalgo, and in December 2004, when Warner was killed, the first call Pat and Mary Donahue made was to the Hidalgos. Now it was the Hidalgos' turn - their first call after the Army officers left their home was to Pat and Mary Donahue.

"This is quite a family," Pat Donahue said of the Hidalgos. "Talk about sacrifice, and of course, now the ultimate sacrifice."

Marine Capt. Jared Hidalgo, 28, who served in Iraq in 2007 and '08, learned of Warner's death in a call from his father. Even though he's a Marine, he has only one tattoo. Lifting his left shirt sleeve, he shows off his best friend's initials and the Marine Corps motto - "RDW Semper Fi" - on his biceps.

"I promised Rich we'd get a tattoo together when he got back from Iraq, and when he didn't come back I got one in his honor. I didn't want to get another tattoo because somehow that would lessen this one," Jared Hidalgo said. "But now with my brother I want to get another tattoo."

Tuesday morning the family talked about Daren Hidalgo's effervescent personality, his smile, his wanderlust, his large group of friends and acquaintances.

Daren Hidalgo was a good high school wrestler, a trumpet player and an accomplished racquetball player who graduated from West Point with a degree in Spanish. He loved to travel. While at West Point he signed up to spend a month at the DMZ in Korea - explaining to his father that he was interested in history. After graduation he completed the Army's elite and grueling Ranger School.

Born to serve

A 1981 West Point graduate, Jorge Hidalgo is not surprised his sons would follow in his path and choose to serve. Jorge Hidalgo, who immigrated to America from the Dominican Republic when he was 7, brought Miles to West Point when he attended his 20th class reunion, and his second oldest son fell in love with the military academy. And when Miles was a senior at West Point, Daren joined him at the school.

"Serving your nation and community is important," Jorge Hidalgo said. "This is a beautiful country. That's the philosophy of this family."

When Daren Hidalgo's family asked him what he wanted for Christmas, he said he wanted presents for his platoon. So the family organized a care package drive and sent more than 30 Christmas packages to his unit.

When they asked him what he wanted for his birthday, Daren Hidalgo noted that he had been assigned to a new command outpost that did not have a coffee maker. He asked for a coffee maker for his soldiers.

Daren's birthday is Friday. It's the day he'll be buried at West Point.

His parents sent the coffee maker for his birthday. It hadn't arrived by the time he was killed. Jorge and Andrea Hidalgo told his company commander to open all packages that arrive in Afghanistan for their son.

They wanted to make sure Daren Hidalgo's men will get his birthday present.

FUNERAL TIMES

Visitation will be from 11 a.m. to 3:15 p.m. Wednesday at St. Anthony on the Lake Catholic Church, W280-N2101 Highway SS, Pewaukee. A eulogy will begin at 3:45 p.m. followed by funeral Mass at 4 p.m.

Donations to the Daren M. Hidalgo Memorial Fund for scholarships and support of wounded soldiers may be made to U.S. Bank, 2040 W. Silvernail Road, Pewaukee, Wis., 53072.