

Monday February 21, 2011

Sorrow that breaks the heart

As spouses in these wars, we spend our time trying to keep our families together, trying either to get through the next deployment or helping our fellow spouses through their ordeals. We see the news that a soldier or two have been killed in operations, but somehow we block it out because we don't know them or their family. We grieve with them, but silently we sigh in our hearts, thankful that it wasn't our spouse. And so, we manage to keep the pain of loss away from the inner part of our heart. That is, until the loss is a bit closer than we expected.

Today I received word that 1LT Daren Hidalgo was killed in action in Afghanistan. Daren attended West Point and I was fortunate to be his racquetball coach. I knew and worked with Daren for 3 of his 4 years at West Point. He was often over at our house for burgers or steaks, or just to hang out. He was such a bright light and wonderful person. And his death is a blow to me personally.

We spend so much time worrying about how this war will affect us, our families, that we forget that there are others who are encountering the same fears we do. Then, out of the blue, someone we know, someone we were close to, is gone. And then the pain hits home.

There are no words to ease the pain of a loss like this. Sure, I wasn't a close family member. I was, however, a friend and a mentor to Daren. His loss hurts more than I imagined it could. And now, I miss him more than ever. Two weeks ago, I got a Facebook message from him about running in a marathon. I planned to take him up on it as soon as he was back from Afghanistan. Now...

The thing is, these wars have the ability to touch us with grief and sorrow from unexpected sources. I've prayed and hoped for my wife's safety when she's been deployed. I've been relieved to hear her voice after a day or two of no contact, just to know she was ok. Now that she's home, I figured I had nothing to fear from these wars, at least until the next deployment. Then, today's news arrived, along with a heart full of sorrow and grief. I'm left feeling empty and hollow, knowing that Daren's life was ended before his time. I can see his smiling face so clearly, as if it was yesterday. This world is diminished by his loss.

For those of you who read this blog regularly, I encourage you to remember those who are deployed. When someone close to us is killed far away from home, the pain is a reminder that when a soldier we don't know dies, there are those who did know him/her well who are feeling the same pain we are now feeling. Pray for them.

Daren Hidalgo, may you rest in peace. Thank you for enriching my life and the lives of so many around you. You will forever be missed and will never, ever be forgotten.

Tim Blake