

YORK DAILY RECORD

Friends: Dallastown soldier's life was one of laughter, purpose

Hundreds remembered First Lt. Daren M. Hidalgo at a ceremony Sunday in Dallastown.

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York, PA - Friends of Daren M. Hidalgo vowed to live their lives as he did - loving, laughing and working hard for a higher purpose - during a memorial service Sunday in honor of the fallen soldier.

A 2005 graduate of Dallastown Area High School and 2009 graduate of West Point, Hidalgo, 24, was killed Feb. 20 near Mama Kiriz, Afghanistan.

Hundreds of friends, former classmates, wrestling teammates and school administrators remembered why they loved Hidalgo at the service, held in the high school auditorium.

A large screen in the middle of the stage bore a photo of Hidalgo, smiling ear-to-ear in his U.S. Army dress uniform. A folded American flag sat on top of a podium to the right of the screen.



Branden Culp-Henise, left, and Samantha Buterbaugh, members of the Dallastown Area JROTC Honor Guard, perform a flag ceremony during a memorial service Sunday for Daren M. Hidalgo. (Daily Record/Sunday News - Paul Kuehnel)

The Rev. Roger Mentzer, who led those gathered in prayer, said, "May we resolve today to make our lives count as Daren's did; that we live, and perhaps die, for things that really matter."

Friend Levi Mattas said he let Hidalgo borrow his motorcycle one day, then got a call later from him - Hidalgo had crashed the bike and an ambulance was on the way.

Mattas asked if there was anything he could do and how hurt Hidalgo was.

Hidalgo's reply: "I'm fine. The girls are going to love this scar."

That was Hidalgo, making light of a serious situation because he wanted to ease a friend's worried mind.

Another of Hidalgo's friends, Phil Bayliss, said with a smile that, the week before the motorcycle crash, Hidalgo had put the finishing touch on the nearly-burned-out clutch on Bayliss' Subaru.

He also said Hidalgo was incredibly strong, but equally as gentle.

As Mentzer said, Bayliss pledged to live his life each day with "purpose, laughter and love" as Hidalgo had done, and "to never underestimate what you can accomplish."

Hidalgo's wrestling coach, David Gable, remembered him as "full of life" and called him an athlete, a scholar and a comedian. Because of his infectious personality, Hidalgo was not part of any one clique in high school; rather, "he truly transcended all levels and all groups," Gable said.

Hidalgo knew how to have fun and how to work hard and how to blend the two in a "nice, neat package," Gable said. He was a leader, but not because he consciously tried to get people to follow him; he led by example, Gable said.

When Hidalgo joined the wrestling team, he had a plan mapped out in a notebook of all of the moves he wanted to add to his skill-set. Then, he methodically went about achieving them. Other wrestlers saw this and wanted to emulate what Hidalgo was doing, Gable said.

Toward the end of the service, two members of Dallastown's Junior ROTC unfurled the American flag that had been sitting on a podium on stage and performed a flag ceremony.

Then, two trumpeters played taps, one echoing the other's notes.

In their words

"I carry his spirit in my heart, and that is something that will never be taken from me. . . . Daren, this is not goodbye, but instead, I'll see you later."

--friend Ali Merrifield

"A true American hero."

--U.S. Rep. Todd Platts, R-York County

"He was truly filled with more love than anyone I've ever met."

--friend Phil Bayliss

"A true American patriot."

--State Rep. Ron Miller, R-Jacobus

"He affected so many people in so many ways."

--former Dallastown Area High School wrestling coach David Gable

"What he has done for us should remain with us as a memorial."

--former Dallastown Area School District Supt. William Thompson

Memorial funds for First Lt. Daren Hidalgo

A memorial fund has been set up to help wounded soldiers and to provide scholarships for wrestlers from Dallastown High School. If you would like to contribute, please send contributions to:

Daren M. Hidalgo Memorial Fund
US Bank
2040 West Silvernail Road
Pewaukee, WI 53072



Robin Ferree Thomas, a 2004 graduate of Dallastown Area High School who said she had once dated Daren M. Hidalgo, writes down a memory before the service held for him Sunday. (Daily Record/Sunday News - Paul Kuehnel)