

An open letter

The first and only time I met Mark Forester was at my brother and sister-in-laws' wedding, in Millville, Utah. When I remember Mark, I see him wearing a tuxedo, a huge smile, and storming down a country lane in a 65 Ford step side pick up with the other groomsman, as they made a memorable rowdy entrance at the wedding reception.

It would only be in later conversations with my brother-in-law, Thad, that I truly got to know who Mark Forester was. Thad told me about Mark's extensive military training; we talked about what a Combat Controller was, and how Thad felt when Mark was deployed to Afghanistan. When Thad and I talked on the phone over the next year, our conversations often turned to Mark and his welfare as he fought on the front lines.

On September, 29 2010, our hearts were broken with a phone call as we learned the devastating news that Mark had been killed in action while serving in Afghanistan. Our souls ached for the loss of life, in one so young, and intelligent, and so good as Mark Forester.

With the loss of Mark, a new learning process began for us, a learning process that is generally reserved for those who lose a loved one in war. We learned what an Angel Flight was. We learned who the Patriot Guard Riders are. We witnessed thousands of acts of love as citizens from Mark's beloved Alabama, as well as folks from all over the United States, shared their love and support with the Forester family. We learned how Mark touched the lives of countless individuals as stories poured in about Mark's sense of humor, his skills as a Combat Controller, and his devotion to his God and Country. We learned to love and care about those who trained and fought beside Mark.

We have learned of the burdens and sacrifices that the survivors endure upon their return.

With this learning, stirring questions began to rise from within. With this knowledge that I now have, how do I honor Mark? How do I show my appreciation for the ideals that he stood for? What can I do to honor the hundreds of thousands of brave men and woman, who have paid the ultimate sacrifice for me? How do I honor the heroes?

About this time, I had the sacred privilege of visiting Arlington National Cemetery. This experience forever changed my life. As we walked those hallowed grounds, reminders of the price of freedom were everywhere, and Mark was at the forefront of my thoughts. While at Arlington, I came across a quote that touched my heart and soul in a way that I had never felt before and it clarified those questions that had arisen.

"It is from numberless diverse acts of courage and belief that human history is shaped. Each time a man stands up for an ideal, or acts to improve the lot of others, or strikes out against injustice, he sends forth a tiny ripple of hope, and crossing each other from a million different centers of energy and daring, those ripples build a current which can sweep down the mightiest walls of oppression and resistance."

-Robert F. Kennedy, Arlington National Cemetery

With the knowledge that I have, my duty and obligation is to live the best life that I can. It is to be grateful for the gift of freedom that Mark and others who have served have granted me. It is to serve those around me. It is to fly an American Flag. It is to show respect to those that I see in uniform. It is to

thank a Veteran. It is to show more gratitude. It is to exemplify more charity. It is to rise when an American flag passes in a parade. It is to be a better husband, father, son, brother, uncle, and brother-in-law. It is to live a life of purpose.

In short, I will be an epicenter of a tiny ripple of hope.

With the knowledge that you now have, dear friend, I now pass the torch on to you and ask:

How will you honor the heroes? What actions and attitudes will you commit to build the mighty current as it rolls forth?

Go to www.markaforester.com to share your commitment to honor the heroes.

Sincerely,

Steve Bartholomew