

Funeral 10-7-2010

Mark Forester - My Best Friend

Let me first start off by saying, I appreciate the time that I have today to speak about a true American Hero and my best friend Mark. I cannot begin to describe how much this means to me and how much Mark means to me as a friend. As I speak today you will hear Marks name many times. Each time that I say his name, I would like for you to think to yourself "Hero" because Mark Forester is truly my hero!

Mark trained exceptional hard to get to where he was in his career. It was truly amazing to watch Mark at work every step of the way. There wasn't a task that an instructor or teammate would hand him that he wouldn't do to the upmost perfection. Everything came very natural to him and if you know about combat control, most will tell you that it's not easy. Mark stood out amongst us as the finest warrior; this is why Mark was chosen to face the enemy in one of the most dangerous places on Earth. I know Mark was very anxious to get down range to take the fight to the enemy. I have heard many stories of how fearless Mark was in the heat of battle and that his teammates would not have rather had anyone else besides Mark by their side.

Mark and I deployed together to Afghanistan in May earlier this year. We staged at a Forward operating base together before we departed our different ways. We said our goodbyes and this was the last time that I physically spent with Mark. I re-live this day a lot and think of all the things that I would have done and would have said if I knew that this was the last time I would see Mark. We had talked on the phone quite frequently while deployed to pass on updates of how we were dealing hate to the enemy. I would try to impress Mark with what I had done that day or day prior but it always seemed like he would have just a little more to brag about, than I did. You can talk to any person in our

command and they can attest to the amazing work that Mark had done during his First combat deployment. He had truly accomplished what few can say have and what many would say that would like to.

Yesterday I had the privilege to speak at Marks funeral in Alabama. It was by far one the hardest things that I have ever had to do in my entire life. Mark and I left together to Afghanistan and came back together as well. Our return was not how I ever envisioned; this is not how Mark and I were supposed to come home together. When I arrived at Dover AFB the first thing that Pat said to me was "Mark was supposed to be invincible". I thought to myself what Pat just said and I responded "He is now". Mark had a job to do on this Earth and it was complete, now Mark has moved on to do bigger things for a greater cause.

When I spoke yesterday, I spoke about our strong friendship. Today I would like to take the time to talk about Mark's Valor and leadership on the battle field. Although I was not physically with Mark on the battle field many have shared their stories of Mark as a warrior. This is a side of Mark that few people have ever seen and many will hear about.

Mark is so much more to me than a friend. Mark and I did everything together. Although Mark and I seemed to live somewhat different lifestyles we always make things work between us. We've done everything from BBQ in my back yard, to Panama City beach trips, driving to Raleigh, and even going to church, we did it all together. We had talked a few weeks ago about how much more we wanted to do together once we got back from this deployment. I proposed a hunting trip to Alaska because I know Mark loves to hunt. He said to me "hey Bobby I think we've had enough of shooting at things for a while" and he countered with a trip to Hawaii and I took it! I was excited for the day that Mark and I met again.

Mark was the most well disciplined and brave person that I have ever met. He always said how I was a little troublemaker and that he was my moral compass. So when I would get a little off track he would set me straight. I have found in the last few years Mark and I never stopped learning about each other. We we're constantly growing closer and he was the type of friend that you know you would have for a lifetime.

Mark was unbelievably smart. I mean he knew everything and if he didn't know something than he would act like he did and I would never know the difference, I would just assume that it was a fact coming from Mark. I could ask Mark anything and vice versa. I learned so much from Mark. I would ask him about nutrition, finances, music, computers, sports, guns, he knew it all. In turn I threw a little flavor in his wardrobe. I would always tease him that he dressed like an old man and he needed a little edge. He finally gave in slowly but would never fully take on the young look I was looking for.

Hair! Mark would always talk about how great his hair was. Well there is a few times that I can think of that Mark had some interesting haircuts. One time at Air Traffic Control school Mark got a haircut, it was skin tight on the sides and perfectly flat on top. He came back to the team house and everyone took a second glance, one guy came out and said "Mark this haircut makes you look like Dolph Lundgren" you know the huge Russian guy that was in Rocky 4. This is how he got the nickname Dolph. This other time Mark really needed a haircut before the beginning of the work week at AST. I selflessly volunteered because it was too late to go to the barber. Although Mark was very skeptical about letting me do this, he decided that he was in such desperate measures that he would take a haircut from just about anybody. So I started to cut his hair with beard trimmers because that is all I had at the time. About half way through the haircut the trimmers died. Mark looked back at me and gave me the extremely concerned look and intern I gave him an uncomfortable look of disbelief. The only thing that I could say was "Its over man". Mark says anxiously "what do you mean its over, ITS NOT OVER, THIS

HAIRCUT IS NOT OVER". I told him the trimmers were dead and that there was nothing that I could do. Needless to say, Mark and I drove to the store and bought new clippers so that I could finish Marks hair.

He would get compliments from complete strangers. They would come up to him and say "Excuse me sir, I don't know if you get this a lot, but you have really great hair". With a huge grin on his face he would respond "well, yes that what people tell me, my hair does look great today". I would NEVER agree because I loved to get under his skin. I would never admit that his hair was better than mine. We would go back and forth and deep down I would be laughing because he would get so upset that I wouldn't admit it. Well Mark, I'm here today with many witnesses, I admit it brother, your hair is better!

Mark and I would talk about his girl situation often and how that he needed to get married. I always told him, Mark you have to take baby steps; you can't just meet a girl off the street and ask her to marry you. Although Mark was very charming and if anyone could pull something like that off, it would probably be him. Girls loved Mark!

Without Mark in my life it is going to be very tough. Mark and I have been roommates for the last two years in Florida and in NC. We would wake up every morning for work and from then until midnight we would spend the entire day together. Eat breakfast together, drive to work, workout, work a little, go to lunch, work a little more, drive home, eat dinner, and depending on the day, watch 24 when it was in season, watch football, anything outdoors, and sometimes I would make him do yard work which he really loved. I mean we literally spent all day together from morning to evening. The crazy thing is that most people couldn't do what Mark and I did, but now I realize we had something much greater than a friendship. I consider Mark my family; I would do anything for Mark. The only thing that I regret is not being able to be with Mark for the last five months while we were deployed.

One of my favorite memories of Mark and I is the time that we went to Tuscaloosa. We stayed with Thad and his wife at their house. Ray and Pat came up to see us and brought with them the most amazing southern cooking. He showed me around the campus of the University of Alabama where he went to school. We ended up going to an Alabama football game which was awesome. Although I wasn't an Alabama fan Mark successfully convinced me to buy and wear Alabama apparel from head to toe. He had me convinced that I didn't like the Gators anymore and that I am adopting Alabama to be my team. From the few times I had the privilege to meet Marks family; I realized that he was blessed with the most beautiful family. You couldn't ask for parents to love their son more than Ray and Pat and a family to love their brother as much as they do. I feel grateful and honored for being able to be a part of the Forester family and them excepting me into their home.

I lost my best friend but I realize now that I gained an entire family from this and I know this is what Mark would have wanted for all of us. Mark sacrificed his life for all of us to have ours. Mark is the best friend that I could ever ask for. I thank God that he put Mark in my life because he has made me into the person that I am today. Although I wish that it could have been for much longer, it was an honor and a blessing to have known Mark for the time that I did. I hope that one day I can be half the warrior and man that Mark is. Memories are all I am left with now. Mark Rest in peace my brother, I will think of you often, and I will never forget you.

I LOVE YOU MARK!

Roll Tide!!!