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Mark Forester – The Warrior

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. This opportunity to share with you today Mark's incredible story may be the only time that you ever hear anything about Mark. Although I truly hope that this is not the case, I ask you one thing, remember Mark... as an American, as a Man, and as a Hero.

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 however, was not how I ever envisioned; I sat there for many hours with Mark just a few feet away. The American flag draped over the casket, this is not how Mark and I were supposed to come back home together. When I arrived at Dover AFB the first thing that Pat (Mark's mom) said to me was "Mark was supposed to be invincible". I thought to myself what Pat had just said and I responded "He is now". Mark had a job to do on this Earth and that job 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 for a lifetime. When I first heard that Mark had given his life on the battlefield, I distinctly remember thinking to myself what a senseless lost. Why did my best friend have to go, in a foreign country, away from the United States of America, away from his family, away from home. Then it hit me, these are all the things that Mark truly loved and was

courageously fighting for. These are all things that Mark Forester gave his life for. Marks will, loyalty, and relentlessness is unmatched by any other.

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 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. Many thought that this was Marks 4th-5th deployment, but make no mistake about it, it was his first and he performed as one of the military's best JTACs. He had truly accomplished what few can say have and what many would say that would like to.

Mark was the most well disciplined and brave person that I have ever met. Mark took these characteristics to the battlefield which made him an extremely feared warrior by his unworthy and cowardly opponents. As the story is told by one of our teammates that were with Mark at his Firebase, Mark and his team of 12 Army Special Forces soldiers were on a clearing operation in a village near by his firebase. As they team neared the village the village elders gathered to talk to the team. Once face to face with the elders, they invited the team to a shura/ a meeting at a local house. But before Mark could make a step further the elders said "not him, we don't want him to come, we are afraid of him, he is the one who drops the bombs". The enemy knew who Mark was, feared Mark and knew the devastation that just one man could bring to the fight.

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. Mark played a huge roll on his team when he was deployed. As you know Mark was just a Senior Airman and every single person on his Special Forces team out ranked him. Rank aside, Mark was probably the most valuable person on the team. Half way through his deployment his team left and Mark gained a brand new team. I was told directly from a teammate of Marks, they would only go on a mission unless Mark said that it was ok to go on the mission. The Captain in charge of the team would consult Mark prior to making any decisions to go on an operation. This is the kind of leadership that Mark naturally displayed and he quickly gained respect from each member of his team for this having this quality.

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.

Make no mistake about it; Mark gave his life on the battlefield for the person to the left and right of you. He went down fighting for this great Nation that we live in, battling the enemy in close proximity, advancing to rescue his fellow brother. Mark selflessly put his life at risk in order to save another and he paid the ultimate sacrifice in do so. 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 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!!!