

**VII CORPS DESERT STORM 20TH REUNION
Ft Myer Memorial Chapel
26 February 2011**

LTG Mark Hertling US Army

“EARN THIS.”

“EARN THIS.”

REMEMBER THOSE EMOTIONAL FINAL WORDS FROM ONE OF THE MOST GUT-WRENCHING WAR MOVIES OF ALL TIME?

CPT MILLER (TOM HANKS) PULLS PRIVATE RYAN (MATT DAMON) CLOSE , TELLING HIM HE NEEDS TO REMEMBER – FOR HIS ENTIRE LIFE -- THE SELFLESS SERVICE AND DEDICATION TO COMRADES?

THE LINE IS POWERFUL...MOVING. IT’S NOT A STRATEGIC RATIONALE FOR WHY SOLDIERS GO TO WAR, BUT IT CERTAINLY DESCRIBES WHY WE FIGHT...FOR EACH OTHER.

REMEMBER WHAT HAPPENS WHEN CPT MILLER SAYS THOSE WORDS?

THE FACE OF A YOUNG PVT RYAN IMMEDIATELY BEGINS TO DISSOLVE AND THEN REAPPEAR AS AN OLDER AND INTENSE MAN, KNEELING AT THE GRAVE OF CPT RYAN AT NORMANDY. HIS WIFE AND HIS CHILDREN AND HIS GRANDDAUGHTERS ALL STANDING BEHIND HIM, CONFUSED.

(PAUSE)

I MUST ADMIT THAT SINCE MY MENTOR, GENERAL FRED FRANKS, JAYHAWK 6, ASKED ME TO SPEAK AT THIS MEMORIAL, I’VE STRUGGLED WITH WHAT I WOULD SAY.

BUT HE ASKED ME TO CONNECT THE 111 AMERICAN AND BRITISH SERVICEMEMBERS WHO SACRIFICED THEIR LIVES DURING DESERT STORM TO THOSE WHO I HAVE KNOW WHO HAVE SACRIFICED IN THE CONFLICTS WHICH HAVE ENGROSSED US THESE LAST FEW YEARS.

IN TRYING TO PUT MY THOUGHTS TOGETHER, ALL I COULD THINK ABOUT WAS THAT ALL THOSE WHO HAD SACRIFICED THEIR LIVES, DID SO AT SUCH A YOUNG AGE.

THEY WERE ALL SO VERY YOUNG.

WITH THEIR SACRIFICE AND IN THEIR YOUTH, THEY GAVE UP WHO THEY WOULD BECOME. THEY GAVE UP WHAT GREAT THINGS THEY WOULD DO WITH THEIR LIVES. THEY LEFT BEHIND SPOUSES AND CHILDREN AND FAMILIES...OR THE DREAMS OF SPOUSES AND CHILDREN AND FAMILIES.

(PAUSE)

AFTER DESERT STORM, I WAS WORKING AS A SPEECHWRITER FOR GEN FRANKS. HE TASKED ME TO FIND STORIES OF THOSE WHO HAD MADE THE ULTIMATE SACRIFICE DURING OUR FIGHT, AND INCORPORATE THOSE STORIES INTO HIS SPEECHES.

ONE OF THE FIRST STORIES I PRESENTED HIM WAS THE ACTIONS OF PFC BRAD COOPER, OF 1-5 CAV, OUT OF THE 1ST CAV DIVISION, WHO SACRIFICED HIS LIFE FOR HIS BATTLE BUDDIES DURING THE FIGHT IN THE WADI AL BATIN.

I HAVEN'T THE TIME HERE TO TELL THE EXTENSIVE STORY OF PFC COOPER'S HEROISM, COURAGE, AND HIS SELFLESS SERVICE. SUFFICE IT TO SAY, THOSE PAINFUL, MOVING FACTS MATTER...TO ME, TO GENERAL FRANKS, AND TO ALL WHO KNEW PFC COOPER.

AFTER I COMMUNICATED THE DETAILS OF PFC COOPER'S ACTIONS TO GENERAL FRANKS, THE BOSS WOULD REPEAT THE STORY IN HIS SPEECHES TO INSPIRE OTHERS...AND TO INSPIRE HIMSELF. IT WAS ONE OF HIS FAVORITE STORIES OF AN AMERICAN SOLDIER.

THEN ONE DAY, GEN FRANKS SAID HE WANTED TO DEDICATE A BUILDING TO PFC COOPER. HE DID THAT IN 1994.

(PAUSE)

WHEN I RETURNED TO TRADOC IN 2009, SUE AND I STAYED IN COOPER HALL AT FT MONROE. THERE WERE PICTURES OF BRAD, AND THERE WERE THE WORDS OF HIS LETTER HOME TO HIS MOTHER, TELLING HER NOT TO WORRY, THAT HE WAS CONFIDENT IN HIS TRAINING AND HIS LEADERS.

HIS PICTURE WAS RIGHT THERE ON THE WALL, SMILING WITH A YOUTHFUL EXUBERANCE AND A GLEAM IN HIS EYE. IT WAS RIGHT NEXT TO A PICTURE OF HIS FAMILY, TAKEN DURING THE DEDICATION.

IN HIS PICTURE IN COOPER HALL, BRAD REMAINS YOUNG, VITAL, REAL. AND YOU CAN ALMOST HEAR HIM SAYING – TO EACH OF US -- “EARN THIS.”

(PAUSE)

IN 2003-4, WHEN GEN DEMPSEY AND I WERE TOGETHER IN 1ST ARMORED DIVISION IN BAGHDAD, 122 YOUNG MEN AND WOMEN WHO WERE PART OF THE DIVISION SACRIFICED THEIR LIVES.

• PVT1 JONATHAN FALANIKO – SON OF CSM IOAKIMO AND MALIANA FALINKO – SACRIFICED HIS LIFE PERFORMING DUTIES AS A YOUNG ENGINEER SAPPER IN FRONT OF AN INFANTRY PATROL. HIS FATHER’S REMARKS TO THE THROG THAT GATHERED IN WESTERN BAGHDAD AT THE MEMORIAL SERVICE RELAYED HIS SON’S PERSONALITY THROUGH THE LETTERS HE HAD SENT HOME FROM BASIC TRAINING. LITTLE JON HAD ONLY BEEN A SOLDIER FOR A FEW MONTHS

I SAW HIS FATHER AND MY GOOD FRIEND – RETIRED CSM FALINAKO -- AT FT LEONARD WOOD A FEW WEEKS AGO. THIS DISTINGUISHED SERGEANT MAJOR OF THE ENGINEER REGIMENT STILL TALKS ABOUT HIS SON AS IF HE WERE A 19 YEAR OLD PRIVATE.

JONATHAN IS STILL FOREVER YOUNG. BUT HIS DAD CONTINUES TO SERVE...TO EARN WHAT HIS SON – AND OTHERS – HAVE LEFT HIM.

• I MET CADET LENNY COWHERD AT A RESTAURANT IN GETTYSBURG IN 2002. SUE AND I HAD GONE UP FROM DC TO MEET OUR SON, SCOTT, AS HIS HISTORY CLASS FROM WEST POINT TOURED THE BATTLEFIELD.

LENNY WAS ONE OF SCOTT’S FRIENDS...A TALL, SKINNY KID, AND WITH HIS FIANCE SARAH SEEMED AS HAPPY AS COULD BE.

THE NEXT TIME I SAW LENNY WAS ON THE STREETS OF KARBALA IN 2004, LEADING HIS TANK PLATOON. JUST A FEW HOURS BEFORE AN INSURGENT SNIPER SELECTED HIM, BECAUSE IT WAS OBVIOUS THAT LENNY WAS THE LEADER.

LENNY SACRIFICED HIS LIFE LEADING HIS UNIT. HIS YOUNG TROOPERS TOLD ME AT THE MEMORIAL SERVICE THAT THEY LOVED THEIR YOUNG 22-YEAR-OLD LIEUTENANT, AND HIS TANK GUNNER TOLD ME HE WANTED TO LIVE HIS LIFE IN SUCH A WAY THAT LT COWHERD WOULD BE PROUD OF HIM. IN THEIR MINDS, LENNY WOULD REMAIN FOREVER YOUNG.

(PAUSE)

• THE DAY AFTER CHRISTMAS IN 2007, I WAS VISITING ELEMENTS OF THE 3D ACR IN MOSUL (PART OF TASK FORCE IRON). CPT ROWDY INMAN – THE INDIA TROOP COMMANDER – SHOWED ME AROUND A COMBAT OUTPOST HIS UNIT WAS BUILDING TO PROTECT A KEY INTERSECTION ON THE ROAD FROM MOSUL TO TAL AFAR IN NORTHERN IRAQ.

ROWDY EXEMPLIFIED HIS NAME. HE WAS OF THE CAVALRY ILK – MUSTACHE, CONSTANT GRIN, EYES TWINKLING -- AND IT WAS OBVIOUS THAT HIS SOLDIERS LOVED HIM.

I FLEW BACK TO TIKRIT AFTER THE VISIT, AND UPON ENTERING THE HEADQUARTERS, I WAS TOLD THAT AN INSURGENT WEARING AN IRAQI ARMY UNIFORM HAD SHOT CPT INMAN RIGHT AT THE SAME LOCATION I HAD JUST VISITED, WHILE ROWDY WAS CONDUCTING A LEADER'S ENGAGEMENT.

I IMMEDIATELY RETURNED TO MOSUL, AND AT THE AIRFIELD I WAS MET BY THE IRAQI DIVISION COMMANDER WHO HAD TEARS IN HIS EYES.

HE AND THE IRAQI SOLDIERS WHO WERE FIGHTING FOR THEIR DIGNITY ALSO RESPECTED THE WORK CAPTAIN INMAN HAD DONE IN SECURING THEIR LIBERTY.

DURING THE MEMORIAL SERVICE FOR CPT INMAN – ONE JUST LIKE THIS – THERE WERE ALMOST AS MANY IRAQI SOLDIERS ATTENDING AS THERE WERE CAVALRYMEN FROM THE 3ACR. ONE OF THE IRAQI COLONELS TOLD ME THAT NAQEEB (CAPTAIN) INMAN WAS THEIR LEADER; HE WAS A MARTYR FOR IRAQ AND THEY WOULD ALWAYS REMEMBER WHAT HE HAD DONE FOR THEM TO BRING THEM FREEDOM.

(PAUSE)

THERE ARE HUNDREDS OF STORIES LIKE THOSE OF COOPER, FALINIKO, COWHERD AND INMAN. FROM THE 111 WHO SACRIFICED IN DESERT STORM TO THE 122 WHO SACRIFICED AS PART OF 1ST ARMORED DIVISION IN 2003-4, TO THE 127 WHO SACRIFICED AS PART OF TASK FORCE IRON IN NORTHERN IRAQ IN 2007-2008.

THESE NUMBERS REPRESENT ONLY A FEW OF THE YOUNG MEN AND WOMEN WHO SACRIFICED THEIR FUTURE FOR FREEDOM AND THEY ARE FROZEN IN TIME IN OUR MINDS.

THEY WERE YOUNG. THEY WERE SELFLESS. THEY WERE FIGHTING FOR DIGNITY, AND LIBERTY. AND MOST OF ALL THEY WERE FIGHTING FOR EACH OTHER.

(PAUSE)

LIKE THE OLDER PRIVATE RYAN IN THE MOVIE, OUR HAIR IS NOW GRAYER, OUR FACES HAVE MORE WRINKLES.

BUT AS MG ALTENBURG CALLS ALL OF THEIR NAMES IN JUST A FEW MINUTES -- AND SOMETIMES WHEN WE SEE THEIR FACES IN THE RUSTLE OF THE WIND -- WE WILL REMEMBER ALL OF THEM AS BEING FOREVER YOUNG.

WHEN THEIR NAMES ARE READ, I KNOW I WILL BE ASKING MYSELF: HAVE I EARNED THIS....