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1May07 - First Lt. Marine Travis Manion "led from the front," said his brother-in-law and close friend, David Borek.

"He wouldn't put anyone in a situation he would not be in himself first," Borek said. "You would never know if he was worried or if he was scared. He was concrete, so strong & maybe to put us at ease. That was his way of protecting us."

The Doylestown man, a 26-year-old graduate of the U.S. Naval Academy, was serving his second tour in Iraq, embedded with an Iraqi army unit that he was leading and training. During a patrol mission Sunday in Anbar province of Iraq, his unit came under sniper fire and Manion was shot and killed.

"He didn't have to be on patrol that day," said his uncle, Chris Manion. "He was on the front lines because it was the right thing to do. He served, not because it was easy or because he liked what he was doing; he did it because of us. He was serving for us. If there were more people like Travis Manion, the world would be a better place."

Manion's mother, Jannette, said her son believed in the mission and wished more people backed President Bush's plan to send more troops to bolster the forces. She recalled a phone call she received from him the night Bush first talked of the troop surge.

"He was so sure what he was doing over there was right," his mother said. "He called the night Bush made his speech about the troop surge and told us, 'That's exactly what we need.' His biggest concern was that the politicians over here were giving life to the insurgents by putting the military and president down."

A few weeks later, Manion sent an e-mail to friends and family from his location in Iraq. In part, he said:

"As far as the job is going, the area is not good right now & but it's getting better, and to be honest, I'm amazed at the ability and dedication of some of these Iraq Army soldiers. ... The IA's in this battalion are very eager to fight and to take control of this city. § It was at times frustrating the first time I was here and it will and has been this time, but as in anything in life, true success does not come from battles won easily."

Manion served with the 1st Reconnaissance Battalion, 1st Marine Division, I Marine Expeditionary Force, based in Camp Pendleton, Calif.

He wrote to The Intelligencer, the sister paper of the Courier Times, shortly after he left for his second tour of duty. In his letter, he wanted to make sure the public knew of the successes happening in Iraq:

"There are many different views on our mission here. However, all I can say with certainty is that there are thousands of Americans over here working hard towards a positive outcome in Iraq. § I am not sure the average American sees the positives these servicemen and women accomplish or even understand the sacrifices of their efforts. However, whatever course of action our leadership decides upon, there are those in waiting, ready to carry out the mission in support of our country and in defense of its people and their freedoms."

Manion's father, Tom, said he was proud of his son's drive to do his best and "give his all" in life and in the military.

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"He was a kid with a big heart, never had a bad word for anyone. He was all heart; that is who he was," his father said. "We've had calls from all over the country, from people who said they loved him like a brother. He really touched people like that."

His sister, Ryan Borek, said he had a way of making people feel as if they were important and special. He had a way of livening up a room, especially at family gatherings, where he would sing to the tunes of Johnny Cash and, at times, pick up a guitar and belt out a song he made up.

"He was definitely not shy," said Ryan. "He could make everyone laugh and smile. He just loved to be around family. That is when he was most at home with this family."

Manion graduated in 1999 from La Salle College High School in Wyndmoor, where he wrestled and played football and lacrosse, and then moved on to the U.S. Naval Academy, where he graduated in 2004.

Christopher Carabello, a La Salle spokesman, said the student body was informed of Manion's death during homeroom Monday morning and said a prayer for him. The school's flag is flying at half-staff.

"He was a very, very well-known student here, very popular and very well-liked," Carabello said. "He was an excellent student. He had a 3.7 GPA and had a commission to the Naval Academy. He was a dynamic student leader and was one of our more accomplished athletes."

In 2004, Manion shared his views about life, wrestling and the military when he was asked to help coach a Central Bucks Raiders wrestling clinic. He wrestled for the CB Raiders from 1991 to 1995:

"You work through the hardships and [you can] be successful, whether it's on the wrestling mat or in battle," he said in a 2004 story in The Intelligencer. "[Wrestling] lays the foundation for what it takes to be a good officer."

Manion spent four years wrestling for Navy. He was a three-time Catholic League champion in high school and a 2004 preseason national top 20 wrestler in college.

When asked about his greatest wrestling success, Manion replied: "Learning the stuff I learned from those coaches. It made me who I am as a person. [They] talk about giving yourself to others and helping out."

MANION E-MAILS

In messages home, Travis Manion was clear about his support of the mission in Iraq and the progress he saw there:

From an e-mail sent to family and friends on Jan. 25, 2007:

³As far as the job is going, the area is not good right now but it's getting better, and to be honest, I'm amazed at the ability and dedication of some of these Iraq Army soldiers. There is definitely a good amount of deficiencies with the IA's, but overall I feel we have a strong and aggressive battalion. Our team is settling in and we are awaiting our additional augments.

These additional Marines will greatly increase our size and they are arriving very soon. This will take a good deal of the workload off the existing members, and they will allow us to concentrate more on advising and training these guys; getting them to the point where they are self-reliant. After a month on the job, I can definitely say the experience here with the IA's so far has been very interesting and educational. Š

The IA's in this battalion are very eager to fight and to take control of this city.

It's been a very challenging Relief-In-Place during a very difficult time in this area of operations, but there is nothing more inspiring on a daily basis than seeing the dedication, warrior ethos, and sacrifice of the men and women out there fighting this fight. It was at times frustrating the first time I was here and it will and has been this time, but as in anything in life, true success does not come from battles won easily.²

From an e-mail to reporter Marion Callahan in early January 2007:

³There are many different views on our mission here; however, all I can say with certainty is that there are thousands of Americans over here working hard towards a positive outcome in Iraq. Every day I am here I see great things being accomplished under harsh circumstances from young Americans.

I am truly honored to serve beside these Marines, Sailors, Soldiers, and Airmen. I am not sure the average American sees the positives these servicemen and women accomplish or even understand the sacrifices of their efforts, however, whatever course of action our leadership decides upon,

there are those in waiting ready to carry out the mission in support of our country and in defense of its people and their freedoms.²

Reporters Hilary Bentman and Jacob Fenton contributed to this story. Marion Callahan can be reached at 215-345-3166 or mcallahan@phillyBurbs.com.

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