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OPINION

Lt. Brendan Looney, You Have the Thanks of a Grateful Nation

By *KT McFarland*

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When my old boss [Ronald Reagan](#) gave the commencement address at the U.S. Air Force Academy in 1984, the tradition was for the president to give the first salute only to the top 100 graduates. Reagan decided to break with tradition and saluted every single graduate, nearly 1,000 of them, standing for hours in the hot sun.

Afterwards his aide said, Mr. President, that was a generous thing you did, those kids will never forget it receiving their first salute from their commander in chief .

"I didn't do it for them, he replied, I did it for me. I wanted to look into their eyes. Because someday I may have to send them into harm's way, to fight and maybe die for our country. I won't hesitate if I have to do it, but I want to know them as people, not anonymous names on a list."

Last week, one of this generation of officers, Naval Academy graduate Lt Brendan Looney, died when his helicopter crashed in rugged terrain in southern [Afghanistan](#). Nine American servicemen were killed.

Brendon was the first of three brothers to graduate from the Naval Academy. He was a star lacrosse player, and played on the [NCAA](#) championship game in his senior year. Also on that fabled Navy Lacrosse team? Brendon's younger brothers Billy and Stephen.

Brendon went on to become a Navy SEAL, and was the "honorman" in his SEAL class.

He married in 2008 and within 48 hours deployed to Iraq.

In all, Brendon deployed to Iraq and Afghanistan four times. In a cruel twist of fate, he died just two weeks before he was scheduled to retire from the military and transition back to civilian life.

Last week, 2,000 of his fellow servicemen and women gathered in Afghanistan to pay their final respects to Brendan and his fallen comrades as they departed for their final journey home. When his body arrived at Dover Air Force Base, hundreds of his friends, family and navy classmates met the plane.

Lt. Brendan Looney will be laid to rest next Monday in Arlington Cemetery, next to his best friend and Naval Academy roommate, Marine 1st Lt. Travis Manion, who gave his life in the line of duty in Al [Anbar Province](#), Iraq in 2007.

In the Reagan administration there was a large oil painting hanging just outside the Secretary of Defense's office. It was of a young family: father in uniform, mother and two young children, kneeling at an altar. Underneath was a verse from the Bible, **Isaiah 6:8**"I heard the voice of the Lord, saying, Whom shall I send, and who will go for us? Then said I, Here [am] I; send me."

Lts. Brendan Looney and Travis Manion answered that call. On behalf of a grateful nation, we give you thanks.

Kathleen Troia "K.T." McFarland is a Fox News National Security Analyst and host of FoxNews.com's DefCon 3. She is a Distinguished Adviser to the Foundation for the Defense of Democracies and served in national security posts in the Nixon, Ford and Reagan administrations. She wrote Secretary of Defense Weinberger's November 1984 "Principles of War Speech" which laid out the Weinberger Doctrine. Be sure to watch "K.T." every Monday at 10 a.m. on FoxNews.com's "DefCon3" already one of the Web's most watched national security

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