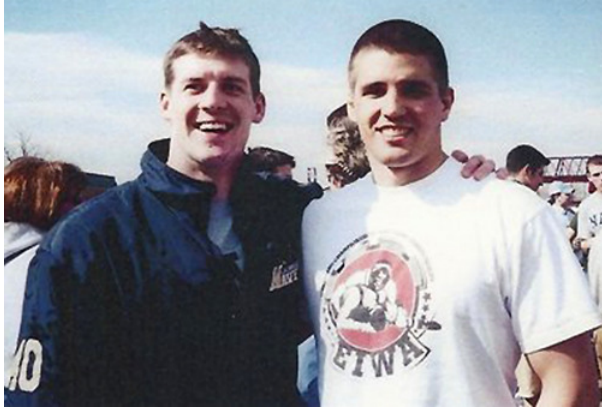


Obama honors Manion, his best friend



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CONTRIBUTED PHOTO - Travis Manion (right) and his best friend, Brendan Looney. Looney, a Navy SEAL.



"The friendship between 1st Lieutenant Travis Manion and Lieutenant Brendan Looney reflects the meaning of Memorial Day. Brotherhood. Sacrifice. Love of country. And it is my fervent prayer that we may honor the memory of the fallen by living out those ideals every day of our lives, in the military and beyond."

-President Obama

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Obama honors Manion, his best friend By Gary Weckselblatt Staff Writer |

President Barack Obama paid tribute to late Marine Travis Manion and his Naval Academy roommate Brendan Looney on Monday, calling them "America's guardians."

"The friendship between 1st Lieutenant Travis Manion and Lieutenant Brendan Looney reflects the meaning of Memorial Day. Brotherhood. Sacrifice. Love of country," Obama said.

The president spoke of the remarkable relationship Manion and Looney developed during a Memorial Day speech at Arlington National Cemetery, where the two men are buried side by side.

Tom and Janet Manion of Doylestown Township, Travis' father and mother, learned Friday that the president would be mentioning their heroic son in his speech.

"We really appreciated the president's message today," Tom Manion said. "It was certainly an honor for the president to recognize Travis and Brendan. It's a special thing to have something like that happen.

"It doesn't bring Travis back but at least it lets us know he's not forgotten."

Janet Manion said, "In the end, it's doing the right thing, not just Memorial Day but every day that this country remembers everyone fighting for our freedom."

She called the friendship of her son and Looney "an unbelievable story."

It was a story that made national news last October, when Manion's remains were removed from Calvary Cemetery in West Conshohocken so he could be laid to rest next to his best friend.

The Looneys, along with Brendan's widow, Amy, wanted the two men who called themselves "brothers from another mother" to be buried side by side.

Manion, 26, was serving his second tour in Iraq when he was killed April 29, 2007. He was embedded with an Iraqi army unit he was leading and training. While on patrol, that unit came under sniper fire.

After giving first aid to a medic and pulling another wounded Marine to safety, Manion was killed when he tried to get another out of the line of fire. He was posthumously awarded the Bronze Star with Valor and the Silver Star for his heroic actions. As a testament to the admiration his unit had for him, the Iraqis named their new headquarters Combat Outpost Manion in his honor.

Looney, 29, of Maryland, was killed last Sept. 21 in a helicopter crash in Afghanistan. He was devastated when he heard of Manion's death.

On his wedding day in 2008, Looney handed Janet Manion his Navy SEAL Trident, telling her, "I want you to have this because Travis earned it right along with me."

Two days later, Looney deployed to Iraq, the first of four tours in that country and Afghanistan. He always wore three items: his wedding band, his watch and a bracelet given to him by Janet Manion with Travis' name.

Travis' sister Ryan and her husband, David Borek, and children Maggie, 4, and Honor, 2, sat with her parents and listened to Obama's words. The Looney family was with them.

"It was an incredible honor," Ryan Manion said. "But it's not just about learning the story of Travis and Brendan and their leadership, courage and integrity. There are thousands of other amazing stories to tell."

Here are the president's words concerning Manion and Looney:

"That is how we can honor the sacrifice of those we've lost. That is our obligation to America's guardians - guardians like Travis Manion. The son of a Marine, Travis aspired to follow in his father's footsteps and was accepted by the U.S. Naval Academy. His roommate at the academy was Brendan Looney, a star athlete and born leader from a military family, just like Travis. The two quickly became best friends - like brothers, Brendan said.

"After graduation, they deployed - Travis to Iraq, and Brendan to Korea. On April 29, 2007, while fighting to rescue his fellow Marines from danger, Travis was killed by a sniper. Brendan did what he had to do - he kept going. He poured himself into his SEAL training, and dedicated it to the friend that he missed. He married the woman he loved. And, his tour in Korea behind him, he deployed to Afghanistan. On September 21st of last year, Brendan gave his own life, along with eight others, in a helicopter crash.

"Heartbroken, yet filled with pride, the Manions and the Looneys knew only one way to honor their sons' friendship - they moved Travis from his cemetery in Pennsylvania and buried them side by side here at Arlington. 'Warriors for freedom,' reads the epitaph written by Travis' father, 'brothers forever.'

"And it is my fervent prayer that we may honor the memory of the fallen by living out those ideals every day of our lives, in the military and beyond. May God bless the souls of the venerable warriors we've lost, and the country for which they died."

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