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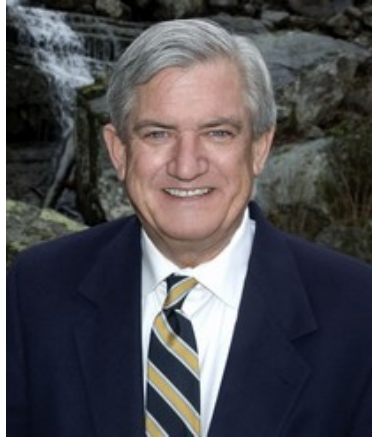
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Opinion

Roy Exum: Brothers Forever

by Roy Exum
posted October 2, 2010

There is a line in the movie "300" that each of us should savor all weekend long because this Monday at the Arlington National Cemetery in Virginia, its words will resonate in a way almost beyond belief. You may remember the film, a fabulous epic from a few years back about the ancient Battle of Thermopylae where King Leonidas and 300 Spartans fought to the death against Xerxes and his massive Persian army.



Roy Exum

Travis Manion, a handsome Marine lieutenant, had just watched a DVD of "300" with some members of his Transition Team in Fallujah, Iraq, shortly before he was killed in 2007 and, in what would be his last telephone call home, had told his dad the Spartans believed there was no greater honor than to die fighting for one's country and its freedoms.

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Within days there was a horrific attack and Travis was later awarded both the Bronze Star and Silver Star, posthumously, for his gallantry and valor, battling in much the way he once wrestled. Travis earned All-American honors in high school and later at the U.S. Naval Academy.

In the movie, Dilios, a Spartan soldier, said at

one point, "Remember us.' As simple an order as a king can give. Remember why we died. For he did not wish tribute, nor song, nor monuments nor poems of war and valor. His wish was simple.

"Remember us," he said to me," repeated Dilios, "That was his hope, should any free soul come across that place, in all the countless centuries yet to be. May all our voices whisper to you from the ageless stones, "Go tell the Spartans, passerby, that here by Spartan law, we lie,"

This Monday, Lt. Manion will no longer lie alone. His best friend and roommate from the U.S. Naval Academy, Lt. Brendan Looney, will be buried beside him. Brendan, a Navy SEAL, was killed in Afghanistan last week when nine soldiers died in a helicopter crash and, in a tender way, the roommates will be reunited.

"They could feel each other's feelings. They understood each other. That's what made them click," said Janet Manion, Travis' mother. She said that after Travis' death, Brendan – a lacrosse star for Navy – entered the Navy's SEAL program as a tribute to his fallen roommate and had even presented her with his prized Trident.

When Manion was first brought home, he was buried near his family in Philadelphia but had once desired to be buried at Arlington with many other great warriors. So his family was actually thinking of moving his remains before word came his roommate, Brendan Looney, had been

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killed.

As soon as Manion's family learned the news, they rushed to the Lonneys. "It's a club no one wants to join," Ryan Manion said Friday. "We know what they're going through. We will be there for them and we can lean on each other."

On Friday, both families were on hand when Travis Manion's remains were reinterred at Arlington National Cemetery and both will stand together again on Monday when SEAL Brendan Looney is laid to rest beside his best friend.

"Brendan was a strong, steady presence for everyone. Whatever needed to be done you could always count on him to make it happen. He led by example and he inspired others to make a difference. When Travis returned from his first tour to Iraq he spoke with Brendan, who shared his frustration with not being more engaged with our efforts," said Col. Tom Manion, Travis' father.

"Shortly thereafter, Travis informed me that Brendan was accepted into the Navy SEAL training program and he knew immediately that Navy SEALs had just gotten an incredible leader. I could tell how proud Travis was of Brendan when he shared this story with me.

"Unfortunately, Travis didn't return home from his second tour to Iraq, but I know he was looking down proudly as Brendan went on to become BUD/S Class 265 Honor man during his SEAL training course and complete several successful tours defending our freedoms.

"Our country has lost a great leader but we've gained an incredible example of courage and commitment for future generations to come. Brendan and Travis are back together again, true patriots who believed in this country. They are of the same cloth: Warriors for Freedom, Brothers Forever," added Col. Manion.

But I also like the movie line, "Remember why we died."

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