

# Supporting the Sacrifice

As Captain Chip Seymour '65, USN (Ret.), led his tour group through Memorial Hall he noticed the temporary plaque for those killed in action was missing. He knew what that meant.

Just hours before, the Department of Defense confirmed that Lieutenant Colonel Mario D. Carazo '91, USMC, had been killed while supporting combat operations in Afghanistan. Captain Bob Hofford '61, USN (Ret.), special projects director, had already contacted John Prehn '72 of Signcraft to complete the temporary killed in action/operational loss plaque—the permanent inscribing of names in Memorial Hall is completed in January and June each year.

Memorial affairs has always been an important role for the staff of the Alumni Association and Foundation—from communicating with and among classes to publishing the family obituary in “Last Call.” The class flag in front of historic Ogle Hall is raised in remembrance of those who have gone before and to honor the class on the day of the funeral held at the Naval Academy. Additionally, a member of the Alumni Association and Foundation staff attends each funeral. Further, classmates and classes are very active in supporting one another and the families left behind.

The Class of 1995 organized an annual Run to Honor event beginning in 2007 to honor six shipmates who were lost in operations. Since then, the event has been expanded to honor all Naval Academy alumni who have made the ultimate sacrifice. Class of '95 classmates Lieutenant Commander Giovanna Kostrubala, USNR, and Jeff Webb have chaired the events, and countless alumni

have helped to support them in their efforts including a memorial dinner.

In August, 435 American and British service members ran a 5K in memory of Major Megan McClung '95, USMC. This was the first satellite running of the event at Camp Leatherneck, Afghanistan. In 2006, McClung organized and ran in the Marine Corps Marathon's satellite race in Iraq's Camp Al Asad so this was a fitting tribute organized by her classmate Major William Conner '95, USMC. Conner worked with McClung's parents to set up the “shadow” event to the race in Whidbey Island, WA, sponsored by her parents and held on the same day.

“Our operational tempo is very high right now, and we're all very busy,” explained Conner in a U.S. Marine Corps release. “But there's always time to honor one of our fallen comrades, in my case a friend. Megan gave her all to the Marine Corps and to her country. It is important for us to remember her.”

Last year was a particularly difficult year for the members of the Class of 2002—Captain Matt Freeman, USMC, was killed in action while supporting combat operations in Kapisa Province, Afghanistan in August; Lieutenant Joe Houston, USN, died in a training accident off the coast of Texas with fellow graduate Lieutenant Bret Miller '01, USN, in October; and Lieutenant Dan Clossen, USN, was wounded in action in an IED incident in the Helmand Province of Afghanistan in September. Classmates and friends rallied around the families and each other to provide support both emotionally and financially. Visits were made, scholarships established, stories

shared and memories relived—the support continues.

Outside of the class structure, alumni are involved in many organizations, events and efforts supporting those wounded in actions as well as the families of those killed in action. In September, as *Shipmate* went to press, planning committee members—Janice Buxbaum '80 and Julien Modica—for the 2010 Veteran Summit: “America's Crisis with Brain Injury and A Future Model” were well into executing the event.

Modica is particularly interested in addressing the issue of brain injuries for veterans because of his own experience. As a recruited athlete in high school, he was injured in a pole vaulting accident. He entered the Naval Academy Prep School in 1978 and the Naval Academy in 1979 with the Class of 1983, but unfortunately left after one year at the Academy.

“I struggled every single day,” said Modica. Even today, he is disappointed that he had to leave the Academy to address his injury, but is redirecting his energy to helping others through their recovery. He is thrilled to have his fellow alumni working with him and supporting the event. A number of alumni will attend including a keynote address to be presented by Senator James H. Webb '68

Events supporting those wounded and killed in action are held across the nation and through the Naval Academy Alumni Association chapter network. As part of their regularly scheduled May luncheon, the Alumni Association North Texas Chapter invited Jim Dolan (USAFA '75), executive director of the Heroes on the Water organization to speak. Also in May, the South Carolina

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speak. Also in May, the South Carolina Chapter held its inaugural Aiken Wounded Warrior Golf Classic with Walter Lamb '55 taking the lead in the event that raised nearly \$7,000 for the Central Savannah River Area Wounded Warrior Care Project.

Alumni involvement is certainly not new and the examples noted are but a few in the tremendous efforts of Naval Academy alumni in both personal and professional endeavors to support those wounded in action and the families of those killed in action.

In fact, alumni have challenged the Alumni Association to do more to for alumni involvement and the Association's efforts in supporting Naval Academy alumni and their families. At the suggestion of members of the Philadelphia Chapter, the Alumni Association has formalized the process and procedures for alumni wounded in action, killed in action and operational losses.

"We have a special obligation to make sure that we honor and remember those who make sacrifices in combat," said Captain Kerr Smith '72, USNR (Ret.), president of the Philadelphia Chapter. Smith was quick to note that he is one of many among the chapter leadership who championed this cause including Steve Maloney '78, John DiLeonardo '73, Charlie Humphreys '74, Tim Farrell '76, Rich Olzsweski '96 and Jeff Webb '95.

The Alumni Association will work with families of alumni once we receive notification, to provide appropriate recognition via our communications outlets, and as appropriate, at memorial services sponsored by the families. This is important work that more formally honors our alumni who have been killed in or wounded in action, while recognizing their families' sacrifice. †



## My "What If"

By Jennifer Zellem

I'm a CPA. I plan my life out many years ahead. When I got married and decided to have children, I began to think about estate planning.

I wrote a letter titled "What If" for my husband, Scott. Included in that were my hopes and dreams for Scott and our son, Tanner, should I die before being given the opportunity to bestow all of the love and bits of knowledge I hoped to share with each of them. I asked Scott to share with me his preferences, should he die. After we shared our innermost thoughts regarding some of our deepest fears, we talked about specifics. We each had a will drawn up, we created a family trust and we both applied for life insurance policies. I was approved for a policy right away. Scott was denied on three separate occasions because he was an aviator. By this time, Scott was preparing for a deployment and we decided to put the remainder of our estate planning on hold until he returned home.

Ten weeks later, Scott was killed when his S-3 Viking crashed into a mountain off the coast of Japan. Tanner was 13 months old. I was a widow.

As it turned out, Scott had a life insurance policy with Navy Mutual Aid Association (NMAA) that he received when he signed up for his midshipman loan. When they were notified of his death, they got in touch with me. They were able to provide me guidance on where to go from that point. They could not help me with the emotional aspect, but they helped guide the financial part which allowed me to focus on the emotions.

Five days after Scott's death, I sat in the office of the Commodore. I asked him, "Who can I talk to who has walked my path? Who can tell me how to get through the next five minutes of my life? Who can tell me how to breathe when my entire life has crumbled around me?" His answer was to tell me there was no one.

The Navy has not compiled a list of widows to provide support for one another. He would never again have to say that to a widow. I promised him that when I learned to navigate the waters ahead, I would make myself available to anyone, at any time, in any capacity.

Once I found my bearings, I became very vocal about the importance of having "the talk" with your spouse. I shared my story. Estate planning and life insurance is something none of us want to think about. None of us want to plan for the "what if" for fear that it may actually happen. I have news: it will happen. If there is one guarantee in life, it is that each one of us will die. We just hope it doesn't happen too soon. Regardless, I encourage each of you to be prepared and to think about the "what if." You may not have to use that knowledge for many years but whenever that time comes, you will be glad you are prepared. †

*Jennifer Zellem is the widow of Lieutenant Commander Scott Zellem '91, USN, one of four San Diego-based airmen killed in a S-3B Viking jet that crashed on an uninhabited island after it had taken off from the aircraft carrier JOHN C. STENNIS, deployed in the Western Pacific in 2004.*