

Tribute to a Fallen Comrade

By Colonel Anthony Cruz

Soldiers join the Army for many reasons. David A. Mejías' reason was simple—he had to do something. He had to do something after watching our Nation being attacked by terrorists. He had to do something about the loss of innocent lives. He just had to do something. That's why 48 hours after the September 11th attacks, just a couple of weeks after his 21st birthday, David Mejías joined the Army.

A few months later (in December 2001), while I was assigned to the 1st Infantry Division (1st ID), Germany, I received a phone call from David. "Guess where I am?" he began. To this, I replied that I had no clue. "I am at Fort Sill, Oklahoma, just starting field artillery advanced individual training (AIT)." David's announcement was unexpected, but it should not have been. After all, his parents had both served in the Army. In fact, they were stationed in Germany in the early 1980s when David was born. David was destined to become a Soldier. It was his calling.

In February 2002, David was assigned to the 1st ID as a forward observer in a field artillery battalion in Bamberg. Although we served together in the unit for only six months, the time that we shared was priceless.

While assigned to the "Big Red One," David, who was then a sergeant, was deployed to Kosovo and Iraq. But for David, being a field artillery Soldier was not

very exciting. It was during his deployment to Iraq that he began to consider leaving the Army. However, he knew that I was a military police Soldier, and that piqued his interest. "Talk to me about being an MP," he implored. I described the branch and told him that if he decided to reclassify, he would surely be deployed to Iraq again. But deploying to Iraq was the least of David's worries. He did not mind that.

About that time, David fell in love with Specialist Caromi Rodriguez, a supply specialist assigned to the 1st Military Police Company, Wurzburg. They were a match made in heaven. Following in the footsteps of his parents, David married the love of his life while on leave in Denmark.

In 2005, David reenlisted; requested a reclassification to the Military Police Corps Regiment; and was assigned to the 10th Mountain Division, Fort Drum, New York. In April 2006, Caromi gave birth to a beautiful baby girl named Leila Mejías-Rodriguez. David missed her birth, as he was at the National Training Center preparing for another deployment to Iraq.

In August 2006, David deployed to Iraq for the second time. As a squad leader assigned to the Military Police Platoon, 2d Brigade Special Troops Battalion, 2d Brigade Combat Team, David excelled as a natural leader and was emulated by his peers and subordinates.

On 1 April 2007, Staff Sergeant David A. Mejías made the ultimate sacrifice when his life and the lives of three of his fellow squad members were violently taken by an improvised explosive device. He was only 26. I had the honor of escorting David on his final journey home to Puerto Rico, where he was laid to rest at the National Cemetery.

David loved the Army and all it stands for. He also loved Soldiers and leading them into battle. He knew exactly what he was doing and why he was doing it. And he wouldn't have had it any other way. Staff Sergeant David Mejías was a great Soldier and a great American! But above all, he was my beloved nephew and my hero. He will live in my heart forever.

