4-10-2007

Mourning the Fallen

Follow this and additional works at: https://ecommons.udayton.edu/news_rls

Recommended Citation

https://ecommons.udayton.edu/news_rls/2164

This News Article is brought to you for free and open access by the Marketing and Communications at eCommons. It has been accepted for inclusion in News Releases by an authorized administrator of eCommons. For more information, please contact frice1@udayton.edu, mschlagen1@udayton.edu.
Mourning the Fallen

04.10.2007 | Campus and Community, Students  A 1991 graduate of the University of Dayton was one of three sailors killed by enemy action April 6 near Kirkuk, Iraq. Chief Petty Officer Gregory J. Billiter graduated from UD's School of Business Administration with a degree in marketing and is believed to be the second UD graduate killed in Iraq. He was 36.

A member of Explosive Ordnance Unit 11 on his third tour of duty to Iraq, Billiter was married and had one child. He was a native of Villa Hills, Ky., and had been in the Navy for 15 years, according to his father, Barry. He attended Covington Latin High School and was one of six children.

According to University of Dayton archives, Billiter was a member of Delta Sigma Phi, a business professional fraternity, and was active in intramural sports on campus.

Billiter and two other sailors with the Explosive Ordnance Disposal Unit died from enemy action while conducting combat operations, the Defense Department said.

The news of Billiter's death came as the University of Dayton remembered its first graduate to die in Iraq. On a brisk, unseasonably cold April morning, University of Dayton ROTC cadets solemnly played taps and offered a presentation of the colors on the steps of the Immaculate Conception Chapel in honor of Col. Paul M. Kelly. As Kelly's widow, two young boys, family and friends slowly walked into the chapel, the Rev. Christopher Wittmann, S.M., director of campus ministry, blessed a plaque listing UD ROTC graduates killed in military action. The "honor roll" included Kelly's freshly engraved name.

Kelly, 45, was one of 13 Americans killed Jan. 20 in a helicopter crash just outside Baghdad. He earned a degree in management from UD in 1984. He was commissioned through UD's ROTC program and held numerous leadership positions in the National Guard, serving in Ohio, South Carolina and Virginia. His assignments took him to the Pentagon, Bosnia and Iraq.

Kelly was remembered for his "unwavering faith" and leadership.

"He took to heart two of the University of Dayton's mottos -- the University of Dayton seal, 'For God and country,' and the more contemporary motto, 'Learn, Lead and Serve,'" said Daniel J. Curran, UD's president. "Paul was a father figure, a friend to many and certainly a great leader."

Patrick Kelly, a 1990 UD alumnus and younger brother, offered the eulogy for the family. "Paul had many friends throughout the world. Once you were a friend of Paul's, you were one for life," he said. "Why did he volunteer to serve in Iraq? What possesses a person who seemingly had it all to risk it all? Paul believed it was his duty to be in Iraq. It was as simple as that."

Kelly urged the mourners to celebrate his brother's life. "Live everyday like Paul did. Make sure the people you love know it. Make sure each day you give thanks to God."

In a homily, Wittmann likened the gatherers to Mary Magdelene, who wept at the death of Jesus. "We weep at the death of a good man -- a hero not only to his family but to many who knew him, to his fellow soldiers, those who were under this command as well as those who far outranked him," he said. "He was a loving husband and father, friend and fraternity brother. A man of integrity, conscience, principle, courage, faith, hope and love. A man we are all proud to call a graduate of the University of Dayton, a model to live up to for current and future ROTC cadets.

"Like Mary Magdalene, we weep at his tragic, violent death," he said. "We weep for our nation and for our world, still so frequently resorting to violence to solve our problems."

Kelly's connection to his alma mater ran deep. He was one of six children, all of whom graduated from the University of Dayton: Brita '84, Theresa '85, John '85, Patrick '90 and Tony '95. Kelly's father, John, graduated in 1975 from UD with a master's degree and formerly served as director of graduate and alumni placement.

"The University of Dayton is characterized by a very strong sense of community. We're proud to say at UD that we're a family," Curran told the Kelly family. "On behalf of the UD family, we share your sorrow and offer our prayers."