

Dear friends,

It is my honor to get to write this letter and tell you about my friend and brother, Derek Martin. I appreciate both your patience in me getting this to you, and your time for reading this; I sincerely appreciate it.

Derek is many things. A father, a brother, a son, an uncle, a friend, but my experience with Derek began with knowing him as a fellow USAF Airman. We met in Mississippi during training for a mission to Baghdad, Iraq, in the Fall/Winter of 2009. We were chosen to be on the same squad, 1-1, and hit it off quick because Derek just made it that easy to have a good relationship with him. He would make the group feel comfortable & laugh while also making sure we knew he took his job seriously and he was going to do everything he could to ensure we got home safe.

By the time we got to Baghdad we had learned more about Derek's history and experience, this was not his first-time walking into a dangerous situation. In some of his previous missions he had been in close-quarters combat with the Taliban in Afghanistan, and on this mission we were heading to Iraq to be a part of the final group of soldiers who would train the Iraqi police & Army how to respond to incidents and protect their population from Al-Qaeda.

There were four trucks in our squad: Alpha, Bravo, Charlie, & Delta. Derek was the Alpha truck driver, and I drove for Delta. This allowed Derek and I to spend even more time together through our driving training, and when we would dismount together on our missions. No matter what we were doing, training or on a mission, there was always a layer of humor and fun present with Derek around. Derek was also a lover of music, especially Metallica, and he was very eager to share this love with the locals in the villages we would visit as well. I have many fun memories of Derek showing different types of music to the local adults and children, and us watching them dance and have fun in the streets.

The children had a special place in Derek's heart wherever we went, too. If we had a mission involving any kind of "gift giving" effort like soccer balls or teddy bears, there was a very strong chance Derek had something to do with the coordination back home to get it done. This also showed in his later involvement with nonprofits and giving back to kids after we were retired for PTSD.

2011 was the year both Derek and I began our exit from the Air Force, after being diagnosed with Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD). As tough and painful as the diagnosis and years that followed were, it was a blessing to get to experience much of the same process with a brother like Derek, even though we were across the country from each other. Throughout the retirement and reintegration process to civilian life Derek was always there for me when I needed him, never strayed away from an opportunity to support one of his fellow comrades.

After discussing our passions about life and helping others Derek and I decided to start a nonprofit to support veterans coping with mental or physical injuries. Derek was also an incredible golfer & coach, and I mean incredible, so we combined our passions with his skills and in 2014 we started a nonprofit aimed at getting veterans on the golf course as a form of alternative therapy; The Rimpact Foundation.

We ran the Rimpact Foundation as a business for a couple of years holding tournaments and gatherings before deciding to shut it down as an entity, but continuing our work giving back under the brand which allowed us and Derek to focus on what we cared about most, spending time with people. Derek would hold free clinics for veterans or local youth, their families, friends, coordinate events to promote people gathering, secure donations for families in need, and much more.

Personally, I feel like one of the main reasons Derek and I started Rimpact was not only to help other people, but to help ourselves. There is something incredibly healing about helping other people, and Derek certainly knew that. Some of his happiest days would be ones where he had some of his most fun memories with strangers on the golf course helping them learn and grow, or when he would spend time with a struggling veteran ensuring they knew they were not alone.

Derek became a voice for his local veteran community wherever he was, stood up for any veteran brother or sister who needed anything all around the world if/when they asked, and battled his PTSD like the hero he was and is until the very end. When I think of the phrase "American Hero," he certainly will always come to mind. Derek is a true warrior and hero to many, and I could not think of a more deserving veteran for a special memorial that I have ever known.

Thank you again for taking the time to read this, I appreciate it and hope you have a great rest of your day and week.

Respectfully,

Michael Weiss