

A close-up photograph of military fabric straps. The image shows three horizontal bands of fabric: a red band on the left, a white band in the middle, and a black band on the right. The fabric has a visible woven texture. The straps are layered, with the white band in the foreground and the red and black bands behind it.

AG soldiers in Iraq



didn't die in vain

By John W. Kennedy

For more than 1,600 families, defending Iraq has meant the death of the soldier they sent off to fight. Like the rain, tragedy can befall the unjust and the just, including faithful Christians.

Nelson and Marie Carman of Jefferson, Iowa, and Randy and Emma Trahan of Crowley, La., are Assemblies of God parents coping with the sudden, violent deaths of their sons.

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Christian soldier had no regrets

With his wife, Emma, away at a women's intercessory prayer conference, Randy Trahan took his 18-year-old daughter Anna Brooke out for supper and bowling on February 18. When they returned to their southwestern Louisiana home at 10 that Friday night (7 a.m. Saturday, Iraq time), Randy received a telephone call from his son, Seth, a sergeant serving with Louisiana's 256th Brigade Combat Team.

Randy, associate pastor at Northside Assembly of God in Crowley, ended the conversation in his customary way.

"I love you, Bub," Randy told his son.

"I love you, Dad," Seth replied.

"I'm proud of you," the father said.

"Thank you, sir," Seth answered.

Randy had no idea the conversation would be his last with his son. Later that morning Seth went out on dismounted patrol, checking for improvised explosive devices at a Baghdad intersection. A blast from a remote-controlled bomb, detonated from a nearby truck, killed him.

When Randy returned home from an errand at church that Saturday morning, two uniformed military officers awaited him. Randy sensed the grim news they had to share.

The officers accompanied Randy as he drove two hours to the conference site to inform his wife. When Randy, with the two uniformed men nearby, pulled Emma aside from a worship service, the rest of the women in attendance began interceding in prayer. Despite the shock, Emma sensed a powerful peace.

"The Holy Spirit told me not to fear," recalls Emma, a teacher at Northside's affiliated Christian school. "I know God hasn't forsaken me."

Seth wanted to be in the military since childhood, perhaps as a forerunner to a career as a state trooper or FBI agent. When terrorists attacked the United States in September 2001, Seth decided to sign up with the Louisiana National Guard as soon as he finished his senior year in high school.

God and country served as twin guiding posts in Seth's life. He always gave generously to church causes, especially missions work. He wrote a \$1,000 check for a special "miracle missions" offering at church just before he left for the Middle East last October. And he made arrangements to have \$100 drafted from his military paycheck — in addition to his tithe — while overseas.

Seth was the only son born to the Trahans, who have three older daughters in addition to Anna Brooke, the youngest child.

"Emma and I have had to walk where we've never walked before," Randy says. "But the God of all grace and the God of all comfort helps us walk fearlessly through unfamiliar paths."

Before assignments in Iraq, Seth often shared Scripture verses and led prayers. Seth's parents have been encouraged by letters and e-mails they've received from soldiers who were blessed by his faithfulness.

"When he prayed it eased the fears of others," wrote Spc. Brian Francis. "Knowing God controls our destiny made me put my trust in God."

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Seth Trahan served with Charlie Company, 3rd Battalion of the 256th Brigade Combat Team. In addition to his parents, Randy and Emma, he is survived by four sisters (clockwise from Seth Trahan in top photo), Emily Nelson, Sarah Olimb, Tara Trahan and Anna Brooke Trahan.



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Nevertheless, for days afterward the Trahans cried out to God, hoping to rewrite the script that snatched their son's life away. In a dreamlike haze, they kept waiting for an e-mail or phone call from their son assuring them everything was all right. Then the reality always hit. Seth had indeed died, and he wasn't coming home.

Summer Richard told the Trahans that Seth made an impact on her husband, Brad. "Thanks to your son's devotion to the Lord and his willingness to share God's Word, my husband now prays morning, noon and night, and he never takes one moment for granted."

Staff Sgt. John Middlebrooks, Seth's squad leader at Fort Hood, Texas, told the Trahans that Seth touched many lives because of his military service.

"Just his presence would remind me of my promise to the Lord," Middlebrooks wrote. "I know this was a price that Seth was honored to pay."

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In March, the Trahans remembered to open a letter that Seth had left with them in case he didn't return. His message assured them he died loving his country and they shouldn't be angry with God.

The Trahans know nothing is wrong with expressing grief and asking God questions. The answers have been reassuring.

"Seth is fine," Randy says. "Today he's with the Lord."

A faithful Marine serves valiantly

Ben Carman, the third of four children, accepted Jesus as his Savior at age 3. Like a lot of little boys, Ben pretended to be GI Joe and built backyard fortifications. Ever since he attended a cousin's wedding as a 12-year-old boy and saw the groom in Marine dress blues, Ben started preparing for the armed forces in earnest. The 2001 terrorist attacks, just after Ben started his senior year in high school, prompted him to sign up to join. He served with the 1st Marine Expeditionary Force at Camp Pendleton, Calif.

Ben remembered God's providential hand over his grandfather Robert Carman, who spent more than two years in German prisoner of war camps at the end of World War II. In a march from one prison camp to another, weak American soldiers who fell out of line faced being put out of their misery by a Nazi bullet. Sick with dysentery, Robert fell to the ground, lifeless. Another American soldier took a tremendous risk, lifted Robert off the ground and stood him against a tree until he regained consciousness. The Germans didn't take any retaliatory action. Robert survived the war, and lived until age 77.

As a teenager, Ben spent his free time in two primary places: the outdoors and with other Christian youth. He relished hunting, fishing, camping and hiking. But he also loved raising his hands in worship at First Assembly of God in Jefferson, Iowa, and praying for people at the altar. He spent hours volunteering at a local skating rink operated by the church.

Those dual passions burned bright when Ben returned home on leave in 2003. He led the congregation in reciting the Pledge of Allegiance while wearing his Marine uniform. His parents gave him an early Christmas present: a muzzle-loader so he could try to bag the big buck that had always eluded him. Ben spent hours walking the family's rural timber-lined property hunting deer.

Ben shipped out for the Middle East in February 2004, the same month he turned 20. He volunteered for one of the most dangerous roles in the military, an infantry "ground pounder" hauling heavy weapons.

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Ben Carman served with the 2nd Battalion, 4th Marines. Family at his funeral (below) included (from left) sisters Catherine Wilson and Amelia Carman, mother Marie, father Nelson, brother James and grandmother Adabelle Carman.



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The lance corporal had been in Iraq for less than a month when he volunteered to liberate a Marine sniper unit under attack. On April 6, with nine other quick responders, he entered a battle in the Al Anbar province west of Baghdad, where 200 insurgents fired their weapons. Ben's special unit saved the Marine snipers, but he lost his life in the battle.

"Until it happens to you, you don't realize there is a high cost of freedom," Ben's mother, Marie, says. "When I used to hear the names, I'd say a little prayer. Now when I hear of another death it really hits home."

Nelson Carman believes in the cause for which Ben died. "When I see the Iraqi athletes at the Olympics getting a standing ovation, when I see Iraqi voters putting their purple fingers in the air, I have to say praise the Lord for freedom and for men like Ben," he says.

Soldiers in Ben's outfit have written to say his prayer life in the midst of danger amazed them. The Carmans believe their son exemplified John 15:13: "Greater love has no one than this, that he lay down his life for his friends" (NIV).

Now, Nelson can better identify with the sacrifice God made in sending His Son to die on a cross for the sins of humanity.

"It cost God so much more than it cost us," Nelson says. "His Son was a perfect Man upright in all His ways."

Nelson often wears a cap emblazoned with the message, "My son is a Marine." When people ask where his son is stationed, Nelson replies, "You could say he's home now," and he begins to boldly evangelize.

"We know where he is. We know we'll be reunited and Ben wouldn't want us to be sad," Marie says. "But that loss is still there. I want to hug him and hear his voice — and I will someday."

That spiritual reality has awakened others. Three families started attending First Assembly as a result of Ben's funeral. Dozens of people from around the country, people who didn't know Ben, have written to his parents saying his sacrifice tugged at their hearts and changed their lives.

Perhaps no one has been impacted as much as Earl Schiltz, principal of a Catholic middle school in Carroll, Iowa, 30 miles west of Jefferson. Schiltz faced crossroads in his own life, and he couldn't shake melancholy feelings after reading about Ben's tragic death. Schiltz met with First Assembly Pastor Rod Block and shared how he and his wife lived separate lives, and about his anger over his son's academic mediocrity. His wife, Kathy, had refused to consider his request for a divorce.

"God hadn't been directly involved in my life," Schiltz says.

Upon visiting First Assembly a year ago he learned that members of the fellowship had been praying for him. At a nondenominational men's prayer group the following day he made a commitment to accept Jesus as his Savior.

"When I stopped being so busy trying to manipulate everything else, God's message became powerful," Schiltz says. "Ben's death served as the catalyst in knocking down a lot of barriers and examining what an idiot I had been." Schiltz says the Carmans have ministered to him several times when they've met for supper.

Two months ago, Schiltz spoke at First Assembly about how Ben's death has transformed his life, saved his marriage and reconciled him with his own son, Jay.

"Logically it makes no sense," Schiltz says. "But the Lord sent Ben into my life at just the right time." ■

John W. Kennedy is news editor of Today's Pentecostal Evangel.
E-mail your comments to pe@ag.org.

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