

**When Men Were Made of Steel:
The Farewell for Navy Commander PATRICK DUNN
Killed in the Pentagon Attack on September 11, 2001**

by
Jeff Watson

Introduction

On consecutive days last week, our nation mourned one of many fallen heroes. Amid marble and stained glass, flowers and flickering candles, hundreds gathered in Annapolis and Arlington to rehearse one clear truth: that darkness can *never* overcome the light!

Naval Academy

On Wednesday, at the Chapel of the United States Naval Academy, we were surrounded by an ocean of dress-white uniforms, from Seamen to Admirals, all filled with honor for a fallen shipmate. Under the same roof where John Paul Jones, the father of the modern American Navy is buried, a band of brothers began to rehearse the character of their fallen friend from the Class of '85, 15th Company, recognizing in him that unmistakable tenor of leadership which was born in an earlier era when ships were made of wood and men were made of steel. Had you been able to join us, you would have been drawn to the words of an earlier Navy man, President John F. Kennedy, who spoke on those Academy grounds when Patrick was but a boy: "Any man who may be asked in this century what he did to make his life worthwhile...can respond with a good deal of pride and satisfaction ...'I served in the United States Navy.'"

Arlington

On Thursday, at Arlington National Cemetery, not far from the grave of the hero of PT 109, we stood two and three deep inside Fort Myer's Old Post Chapel, this while six gray horses—one riderless—stood outside, waiting to carry the silver and gray casket of a 39-year-old patriot, on our sorrowing walk into resurrection ground.

Pat's Life

On these two days of mournful celebration, Navy Commander Patrick Dunn brought us to attention and said, through his shipmates on Wednesday, "I am proud to be an American; specifically, I am very proud to be an American who serves in the United States Navy." On Thursday, Pat's sentiments echoed to us from beyond the horizon, when he said through his friends, the Navy Chaplains, "I am comforted to be a Christian; specifically, I draw deep hope from the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus Christ."

Not far from the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier on Thursday, we all thanked God that we had known this soldier, this sailor. In memories, public and private, Pat's portrait was painted with the oils of admiration. We heard him described as: "Sensitive... smart...funny...loving and loveable...a storyteller to rival all Irishman...a reflection of the best in all of us...a wonderful uncle...a peacemaker...the baby of the family...confident, but not cocky...a great son and grandson...a joyful husband and father-to-be...Stephanie's perfect knight...a magnificent influence on the ship...known for hard work, well done...among the happiest men on earth... having the purest heart of any man I know."

Patrick Dunn now belongs to history, but we were proud to have known him. As a decorated engineer and Executive Officer, he showed us that he could master the heavy equipment of modern fleet operations; as a recruiter, he showed us that he had mastered the rich personality of the U.S. Navy; as a member of the strategy branch for the Chief of Naval Operations at the Pentagon, he graduated to glory on September 11th, doing what he loved best, blending an excellence of mind and body in service to this great nation.

Spoken by a company mate who survived September 11th: "...We gave some, but Patrick gave all." On behalf of a grateful nation, President George W. Bush, through an Admiral, has now conveyed on Pat two posthumous awards: The Purple Heart and The Meritorious Service Medal.

Conclusion

As Thursday's ceremony came to a close, The Washington Post reported that, "...[F]or a moment, Stephanie...stood under a threatening sky in Arlington National Cemetery, at the center of national grief." As the Navy Band fell silent, the 21 guns fired their farewell, and a sailor played taps in the distance, we were all struck as we wheeled to our right and were confronted through a natural opening in the nearby trees to see the scorched hole where the hijacked 757 slammed into the Navy watch at the Pentagon.

Unwilling to foul today's air by pronouncing the names of those new Hitlers of the 21st century, we have steadfastly purposed to lift up the name of one good man, in love with one good woman, together in service to one great nation with a great future.

Were Pat standing with us as we wheeled away from the grave, I believe he would not have stared at the hole or cursed the terrorists; he would have rendered a smart salute to the grand American flag, equally visible there through the trees. Patrick has weighed anchor one last time, but I know, Stephanie, you are still waving your flag of undying love toward that horizon that separates this world from the next.

On Eagle's Wings

Our prayer for you and your baby, for the whole Ross and Dunn families, come from the great hebrew patriarchs, Isaiah, Daniel, and Jeremiah, promising words about the love and presence of God, sung upon you both in Annapolis and Arlington.

Stephanie...

And He will raise you up on eagle's wings,
Bear you on the breath of dawn,
Make you to shine like the sun,
And hold you in the palm of His hand.

From the Prayer of Max Lucado: "Do It Again, Lord"

"...What we saw here last Tuesday, you saw there that Friday. Innocence slaughtered. Goodness murdered. Mothers weeping. Evil dancing. Just as the smoke eclipsed our morning, so the darkness fell on your Son. Just as our towers were shattered, the very Tower of Eternity was pierced. And by dusk, heaven's sweetest song was silent, buried behind a rock. But you did not waver, O Lord. You did not waver. After three days in a dark hole, you rolled the rock and rumbled the earth and turned the darkest Friday into the brightest Sunday. Do it again, Lord. Grant us a September Easter. We thank you, dear Father, for these hours of unity. Christians are praying with Jews. Republicans are standing with Democrats. Skin colors have been covered by the ash of burning buildings. We thank you for these hours of unity. And we thank you for these hours of prayer. An enemy sought to bring us to our knees and succeeded. That enemy had no idea, however, that we would kneel before you. And that enemy has no idea what you can do. Let your mercy be upon our President, Vice President, and their families. Grant to those who lead us wisdom beyond their years...Have mercy upon the souls who have departed and the wounded who remain... Amen."

Source: "A Memorial Service for Commander Patrick Dunn, USN: National Tragedy," Keith Willhite & Aubrey Malphurs, Eds. *Handbook of Contemporary Weddings, Funerals, and Special Occasions* (Grand Rapids: Kregel, Winter 2003), 253-256.