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Story of Nick's death reaches soldier in Iraq

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Tyler Hall Brown never met Nikolaus Artman, but the story of his tragic death before the birth of his twins stirred the young soldier into action.

The Army 1st lieutenant scraped together a \$200 collection from his 22-man platoon and sent it to Nick's parents for their unborn grandchildren.

"Can you imagine?" Art Artman said of the stranger's kind act for his slain son. "He is in the middle of a war fighting for his life and he's thinking about someone he never met? It was unbelievable.

"When we opened the envelope, you could see the sand marks from their hands where they signed their names."

Brown also told his own folks back in Atlanta, Ga., how the thought of two children being born without a father troubled him. He wanted to do more — a desire they later fulfilled.

Tyler Hall Brown was killed Sept. 14, 2004, three months after Artman's murder, while leading a patrol near Ar Ramadi, Iraq, 70 miles west of Baghdad. He was 26.

His service and sacrifice earned him many honors, including the Combat Infantrymen Badge, Bronze Star and Purple Heart, but those who knew him said he lived with honor long before stepping foot in the Middle East.

They recall his unshakable optimism, competitive nature and warmth. The gesture for the Artman family didn't surprise his mother.

"He was just that type of young man," Sally Brown said. "He worried about a lot of things and cared so much for other people. He was a very thoughtful, determined person. Yet, he was light-hearted and loved to have fun."

The youngest of three children, Brown graduated with honors in 2001 with a double major at Georgia Tech, where he was class president and in the Army ROTC program.

He was the kind of guy who was tough enough to earn paratrooper wings and complete the rigorous Army Ranger training. But he also organized Christmas parties, instructed his men on the finer points of wine and, in college, organized an etiquette program for his fraternity.

Although young, Brown had traveled to every continent but Antarctica. His service in the Army took him even farther.

He had been stationed in South Korea, but his unit, 1st Battalion, 9th Infantry Regiment, was re-deployed to the Middle East in August 2004. After three weeks of training in Kuwait, they moved on to Iraq.

Brown died two weeks later.

He didn't have to go. In fact, Brown had received orders to report to Washington, D.C., to serve in the elite Old Guard, a much-safer assignment that included being an escort at military burials in Arlington National Cemetery.

But he chose, instead, to stay with the unit he led.

“He told me, ‘Mom, I can’t leave these men. They’re my boys,’” Sally Brown recalled. “He just felt like he was there to take care of them.”

And he did. After a superior ordered him to discipline a soldier accused of lying by forcing him to run 10 miles, Brown — who believed in the man’s innocence — ran each step along side him.

Another soldier, Alex Jerome “AJ” Karp, of Addison, one of Nick’s friends, called Brown while they were on leave to seek an extension so he could attend the funeral, where he was a pallbearer. Brown made a bunch of phone calls and got him more time.

Three months later, lying near death from a sniper’s bullet, Brown was able to warn the others before they, too, were hit. The sniper got away, but no one else was injured that day.

His parents, Sally and Carey Brown, buried their youngest child at Arlington, where the Old Guard he would have joined stood watch.

His family set up a scholarship in his honor at Georgia Tech. They also helped fulfill at least one wish in sending another \$500 to the Artman twins.

“It’s what he would have wanted,” his mother said.

In his 1996 high school yearbook, Tyler Hall Brown wrote, “The only life worth living is the one in the service of others,” paraphrasing Albert Einstein.