

THE HONOR IN SILENCE

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'Writer's Corner

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On August 11, I had the honor of attending the transfer ceremony for PJ Facun, my wife's cousin and one my kids favorite "uncles."

PJ, 27, of Florida, passed tragically in a motorcycle accident in Hawaii after arriving just a few weeks ago. He had been in the Coast Guard for five years and re-enlisted for three years, assigned to the USCG Cutter Rush based in Honolulu. I wanted to write some of my thoughts on what I observed at the transfer ceremony in Fort Lauderdale.

When the Delta jet arrived at the gate, myself, my son, PJ's brother and some other close family members were at the gate waiting on PJ's mom, dad, sister and girlfriend to deplane along with PJ's Coast Guard military escorts. The flight crew asked everyone on the plane to remain seated while the family was allowed to leave.

Of course, as you can imagine, there was raw emotion when we first met the family there on the jetway. We were escorted out of the jetway and onto the tarmac. Right away we noticed the TSA had a contingent of honor guard lined up at attention.

After a few minutes, as the Delta ground crew opened the cargo door, I couldn't help but notice the profound silence. The only thing heard was the whining of the jet engines. I also noticed the waiting passengers begin to gather at the window overhead.

After a few minutes, the hearse arrived with the Coast Guard pallbearers and we were escorted past the TSA contingent over to the ramp conveyor. The TSA snapped to attention and rendered honors to the passing family.

As we approached the ramp, PJ's flag draped casket was brought from the belly of the jet. The Delta ground crew treated it as if they were handling the most delicate of possessions. The honor guard and Coast Guard pallbearers quickly snapped to attention as the casket was gently taken out into their care.

It occurred to me then that the only sound of an otherwise loud environment was the agony of those who loved him. As I looked around, I couldn't help but notice the profound stillness. Everything within sight became completely motionless. All ground operations stopped. Workers dismounted their vehicles and stood facing the casket. No movement whatsoever. Even taxiing aircraft stopped in their tracks. There were no landing or takeoffs for a brief period. As far as you could see, complete stillness.

As PJ was placed inot the hearse, we were shortly escorted back into the passenger terminal. What is usually a bustling flurry of activity and noise was completely silent.

While no one said a word as we passed through the throngs of people, there was an unspoken reverence that was obvious to all of us.

Having served in the military, I can say I was incredibly proud to have witnessed this display of honor. It didn't matter that PJ didn't die fighting in some far-off land; he died serving this great county, doing a job very few of us would do. It was an awesome tribute to a young man who loved life, loved Christ and absolutely loved his family and friends.

Thank you, Delta Airlines, for your respect and the manner in which you handled this. Thank you as well to the TSZ for the honor and respect rendered to us and PJ.

As for the U.S. Coast Guard present..thank you!

Semper Paratus!

*Read more 'Writer's Corner' at: <http://www.ajlambert.com>