

Travis & Brendan's Story



The Foundation's Mission is to assist our nation's veterans and the families of Fallen Heroes. We will continue the service to community and country exemplified by these Fallen Heroes and veterans. In the spirit of the Fallen, we will foster strength of mind and body to create a generation of future leaders.



“If not me - than who?”

Travis Manion



Horrific news from Iraq's Al Anbar province was still sinking in when the Manion family's phone rang in Doylestown, Pa. On the line was Brendan Looney, calling in the middle of grueling Navy SEAL training. The strong, aspiring warrior was bawling hysterically.

Earlier on that Sunday, April 29, 2007, Looney's Naval Academy roommate and dear friend, 1st Lt. Travis Manion, was killed by a sniper's bullet as he drew enemy fire away from wounded Marines. Manion, 26, was posthumously awarded the Silver Star and Bronze Star with Valor for heroism and gallantry displayed in combat.

Before Manion left for what would be his final combat tour, someone asked him why he had to go back to Iraq. The Marine's response was simple, but direct: "If not me, then who?"

Looney asked himself the same difficult, poignant question as he contemplated quitting SEAL training to mourn his friend.

"(Brendan) just wanted to come back, but he couldn't leave," Travis' older sister, Ryan Manion Borek, told The Unknown Soldiers. "My parents said 'Brendan, you can't quit. Travis would never want you to quit.'"

Looney went all in on Navy SEAL training, perhaps the most physically demanding 30-week program known to man.

"He dedicated the rest of his training to Travis," Brendan's sister, Erin Looney, told me. "He would never give less anyway, but he was going to give that much more for Travis — that extra little edge."

On June 22, 2008, Lt. Brendan Looney graduated as "Honor Man" of his class. With his wedding and a deployment to Iraq just three weeks away, Looney made an emotional journey to Pennsylvania his top priority.

"When he graduated from SEAL school, the first thing he did was visit my parents," Ryan, 31, said.

Looney made it home safely from his first combat deployment and would fight overseas three more times, with "if not me, then who?" always in the back of his mind.

"Brendan never wanted us to worry or think about him being in danger," his younger sister, 23, said. "He was always going to protect us — even protect us from worrying and stressing about him being over there."

On Sept. 21, 2010 in southern Afghanistan, Looney, 29, boarded a Black Hawk helicopter with three fellow SEALs and five soldiers. The chopper crashed in Zabul province, killing all nine American service members aboard.

Amid dual tragedies that could tear any family apart, the Looneys and Manions came together. After Brendan's wife, Amy, said she wanted her husband resting close to his best friend, Travis' parents agreed to move their son's grave from Pennsylvania to Virginia. The heroes now rest side by side at Arlington National Cemetery.

"The ceremony was amazing, beautiful and heartbreaking," Ryan, who witnessed her only brother's burial for a second time, said.

Erin said that as kids, she and her siblings, three of whom went on to serve in the military, always wanted to hang out in Brendan's room — "the cool room" of the house. Today, she spends hours sitting in the Arlington grass, next to her big brothers in arms.

"We were so lucky to get to know them and be a part of their lives," Erin said, bringing tears to my eyes. "One is rare enough, but to have two, both brothers to you, is on a whole other level."