



Special Warfare Combat Support Development Special Edition

Memorial Day
25 May 2020

MEMORIAL DAY– WHAT IT MEANS TO ME



Memorial Day is set aside to remember the patriots who died serving in our nation's military. Memorial Day was just another holiday to me until I joined the Air Force. It is now a day to remember friends long gone, reminisce with the friends I still have, and honor the fallen.

Some of you may be familiar with this story, others are not. Either way, this one is personal and it's hard to tell. Martin Tracy was the finest human being I've ever met. I knew this before he died, it isn't something I made up after the fact. I also sent him to his death. There, I said it. Shocked? Don't be. We make life and death decisions all the time in Spec War. We are selected, trained, and experienced enough to make these decisions. To do otherwise would be a betrayal of the trust and training invested in us. The decision I had to make that day did not seem like a life or death decision at the time; fate was kind enough to spare me the knowledge of what would follow. But this isn't a story about death, it's a story about life, and why Memorial Day is a time to thank God that our Teammates lived, not to mourn how they died.

I had to decide who to send to Puerto Rico in support of US Army Special Forces in South America. The last team we sent were two very experienced Combat Controllers and they called back to me and said, "These guys [Army Special Forces Team] are for real; send our best". The ODA was fit, smart, well organized, highly trained, well equipped, and VERY aggressive. They beat each other up every Friday for fun. I knew right away I had only two guys to send, Chris Matero and Martin Tracy. Martin and Chris had been home less than eight weeks when I had to break the news to them. Both were married with two children. Both had been deployed to Afghanistan for six months and family life was just returning to normal. I hated to ask so much of them but I really had no choice; they were the BEST. They understood.

Martin and Chris readily agreed to deploy to Puerto Rico and enjoyed it tremendously. They trained hard, got in even better shape (I didn't know that was possible) honed their skills even sharper (I didn't think THAT was possible either) and had a great time...right up until the MC-130 they were on crashed into a mountain, killing all on board.

That's when Memorial Day became personal to me.



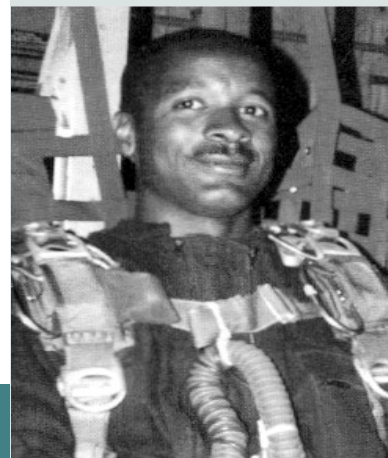
Martin Tracy

18 JULY 1969– 7 AUG 2002

Teammate

Brother

Warrior



MEMORIAL DAY (CONTINUED)

One of the most special days of my life was the day I told Martin I was shipping him to Puerto Rico. We met at a local park built on and around a huge hill. This gave us a choice of a modestly hilly 3.3 mile run around the base or a much more challenging 5.2 mile loop to the top and back. We started off like we always did; a brief warm up, a quick discussion of the plan (easy run around the base of the hill and let's see what happens from there) and off we went.

Then we did what Martin and I always did; we started picking up the pace. Martin and I were two of the fastest runners in CCT and we were both on the same team. Naturally, we had to challenge each other. Today would be like most days; we were going to see who would back down first. I had certain advantages; I ran College Cross Country and Track, knew how to design a program, and had been coaching High School Cross Country less than a month before. I was pretty fit- I could run 10 miles in 60 minutes and I knew it. Martin had some advantages of his own. He was simply a beast and he was hard as nails. He had also been running around the

mountains and high plains of Afghanistan for months wearing combat equipment. And he had a new-found confidence born of having been to war, shot at and missed, shot at others and hit them, dropped bombs on bad guys, freed an MC-130 that got itself stuck in the mud, cleared Terrorists out of a hospital in Kabul (read *Horse Soldiers*, it's referenced there). It was a pretty even match. It always was.



Martin Tracy (standing second from left) and team after helicopter alternate insertion/extraction training in 1999

About a mile into the run, Martin grinned and asked if I wanted to take the hilly route. I should have known something was amiss, but I didn't. "Sure" I, I confidently replied. He grinned his famous grin. I knew he was up to something but I didn't know what. I did my self-assessment and devised my plan: I know this hill and I know how to pace myself. He's out of shape and I'm in shape. At the sharp bend as we are nearing the top, I'm going to cut to the inside, push hard up the slope, get three fast steps at the top, and eat Martin for lunch. I'll hit him when he's the most tired, in the toughest terrain, and force him into Oxygen debt as he chases me. He'll catch me but he will be so busy recovering from his Oxygen debt that he won't challenge me and I'll be able to slow down.

We made small talk as we kept picking up the pace. Whoever couldn't hold up their end of the conversation was the loser. It was a part of the game. Things went according to plan and I launched my assault. Then the plan fell apart. I stopped talking to make my m and Martin either saw my attack coming or had his own plan because he matched my stride, moved further to the inside of the curve and forced me to run a greater distance on the outside of the curve. "That's OK", I thought, "I'll just push the pace and put him in debt sooner. He goes with me or he falls behind." I picked it up. Martin picked it up. I picked it up again. He matched me. We were now in a sprint up a steep slope in the dark (it was about 0615 in the morning) and we were seriously hurting. I could see the sweat pouring off Martin and hear his labored breathing but he wasn't slowing down. Up we went. "Three fast steps" I thought as I hit the top. Martin matched my three fast steps. I throttled back a tad, so did Martin. We both needed to slow down to rid ourselves of lactic acid. Not an armistice, not even a truce, we were just equally matched. I knew we were going to hold pace and things were what they always were; a competition that was a lot of fun and helped each of us to reach our max potential. Iron sharpens Iron. I prepared myself to endure another 2 miles at a hard pace and set my throttle and expectations to match.



MEMORIAL DAY (CONCLUSION)

Turning around the halfway point at the hilltop overlook, we had a beautiful view of the lights below. I began to relax. MISTAKE. Martin sprang his trap, “Hey MC...let’s run that loop.” It was a challenge unspoken, “Do you have the guts?” I couldn’t say no. Besides, I was recovered and with my endurance, I was ready to bury Martin. “Sure” I said. Short sentences are all you can manage when you’re at 80-90% Max Heart Rate. I knew for sure that Martin had the advantage now; he knew the terrain and I didn’t. I’d never been on this trail, had never known it existed. Obviously, he did. And so, the next round of hell started. Martin would pick it up on curves and hills that I didn’t know were there and couldn’t see coming in the dark. I retaliated by staying right beside him on the up hills and cutting him off whenever I was on the inside of the turn.



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A running duel in the dark with a great friend is a beautiful thing, with your heartrate in the stratosphere, your labored breathing in your ears, the terrain and route unknown; reality is suspended and there is only this moment. Do all you can do. Reach deep. Find a way. Do not back down. Do not let your buddy down. Self-assess, watch for opportunities, find the zone where there is no pain, there is nothing but the power of will. Endorphins release and pain is gone. Stride lengthens, gone now is even the sound of your breathing, there is no sound, no sensory input but the road on your feet and gray vision. There is a silhouette of a friend at your side in the moonlight as you push limits and are beyond self. There is only spirit and will-power moving a body light as a cloud. We made it through the loop and were once again on known terrain and going downhill. Neither could find an advantage and neither cared any more. We finished together, neither seeking advantage, just camaraderie. We were in the zone, no breath to talk and no need to.

We finished our run and stretched in silence. Once again, we had been to the ragged edge of performance where you give all you got and you do whatever it takes not to let your buddy down. As we came down from the Endorphin high, we returned to reality and I asked him if he wanted to volunteer for this assignment or wanted me to “order” him to Puerto Rico so his wife and kids wouldn’t feel like he was choosing the assignment over them. He said not to worry about it, he knew he was the best guy for the job and he looked forward to working with Chris.

This Memorial Day, honor the fallen by doing the Weekly Workout Challenge.



Martin Tracy and Teammates , Afghanistan 2001



WEEKLY WORKOUT CHALLENGE

– MARTIN

MSgt Martin Tracey, USAF CCT,
killed in training 8 AUG 2002

**complete each exercise before
moving to next**

For Time:

20 [Pull Ups](#)

100 [Sit Ups](#)

85 [Push Ups](#)

3-mile run

1500m swim

About the Author

Sean McLane retired as a Lt Colonel after 23 years of service as a TACP, CCT and Special Tactics Officer. He has been a Special Warfare Developer since 2017. He and Martin were friends, rivals, and teammates from 1998 to Martin’s untimely death in 2002.

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