

14 May 2008

SPC Justin Rollins served as a Paratrooper in C Company, 2-505 PIR, 82<sup>nd</sup> Airborne Division. He was killed in a complex improvised explosive device attack while conducting a combat patrol in the volatile city of Samarra on 5 March 2007. I first met Justin Rollins in July 2005 as I prepared to take command of C Company. He was one of the first Paratroopers I met and over the next 21 months I was lucky to have the opportunity to get to know Justin, or “RORO” as he was known to the men of Charlie Company, during arduous training events and fierce combat. SPC Rollins’ mental and physical toughness, courage and sense of humor inspired me.

In the year prior to our units’ deployment to Iraq, the Company deployed in support of the Hurricane Katrina relief efforts in New Orleans, LA. Here is where I first saw a small glimpse of RORO’s toughness as he tirelessly worked in 100 degree weather, paddling, dragging and carrying his boat in his efforts to rescue the stranded citizens of New Orleans. The unit returned to Fort Bragg after its successful mission in New Orleans and immediately began to prepare for its tough mission in Iraq. SPC Rollins excelled in the training prior to deployment, smiling and laughing and encouraging others during a 10 mile run. He earned top marks during machine gun training as well as continuing to excel during numerous grueling field training exercises; during one long run I distinctly remember him telling me that he didn’t volunteer for the Airborne for it to be easy. He accepted the challenges that lay before him.

Justin deployed with Charlie Company to the turbulent and hostile city of Samarra, Iraq in August 2006. SPC Rollins understood the dangers that lay ahead in the dilapidated city streets of Samarra but he was undaunted by the challenge. One would find him manning the machine gun in the lead vehicle, exposed to all the potential dangers that lay before him. Justin knew he was one of the best machine gunners in the Company and he took pride in being able to support his extended family, the men of 1<sup>st</sup> Platoon, Charlie Company. I personally took great comfort in knowing that RORO was manning a machine gun, watching out for his fellow Paratroopers as we fought through the tough city streets. Wounded once by an IED, he quickly recovered and was back on his machine gun proudly displaying his new scar for all to admire. Justin epitomized the word heroic, witnessing him duel with enemy forces as bullets smacked and cracked all around him and to see Justin refuse to back down and drive into the heat of the battle was inspiring.

SPC Rollins’ toughness and courage were balanced by his sense of humor. He had a contagious laugh that could be heard through out the confines of the austere patrol base. You always knew when Justin entered a room because the volume level would dramatically increase. His ability to joke and laugh in the most difficult situations whether it was a training event in a cold rain at 2AM, after an exhausting firefight or even during a firefight, gave others the confidence to believe that everything was going to be alright at the end of the day.

5 March 2007 was a clear day and SPC Rollins was once more manning the machine gun in the lead vehicle on a combat patrol in the city of Samarra with his band brothers from the 1<sup>st</sup> Platoon. A large explosion took Justin’s life and the lives of seven of his friends. It was a dark day for Charlie Company and we all missed and needed Justin’s laughter that day. Justin was an

outstanding young Paratrooper with unlimited potential. I feel lucky to have had the opportunity to serve alongside such a brave young man and I know that I am a better man today for having had Justin as part of my life.

***AIRBORNE!***

***ALL THE WAY!!***

Eugene J Ferris  
MAJOR, USA