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Soldier's death mourned in Middleboro

By Sean Flynn, Enterprise staff writer and Alice C. Elwell, enterprise correspondent
MIDDLEBORO — An Army private with a young daughter and "adopted family" in Middleboro was among eight soldiers killed in a car bombing in Iraq last week.

Army Pfc. Norman Darling, 29, a native of the Bahamas who listed the McCarey family residence at 58 Short St. as his home address, was killed just south of Baghdad on Thursday when a vehicle approached his patrol and detonated a bomb, according to the U.S. Department of Defense.

The Pentagon released the names late Sunday night.

"He enjoyed the military," said Martina McCarey, a friend. "He put his heart and soul into it."

Darling is the fourth person with local ties to die in the Iraq region since the war began in March 2003.

Darling dated McCarey, 28, now of Manchester, Conn., for about 3 1/2 years until August of last year. They remained close and corresponded regularly by e-mail. Martina said she last heard from him on Tuesday.

Martina's parents, Robert and Diane McCarey of Middleboro, drove to Connecticut on Friday to tell her the news.

"I was completely devastated," she said. "I'll truly miss him so much."

The McCareys last saw Darling on Christmas, before he shipped out to Iraq in January where he has been ever since.

"He started out in Baghdad and was heading toward the Fallujah area," she said.

"He didn't tell me a lot about what they were doing," she said. "They're not allowed to. He said it was pretty brutal, but not to worry. He was OK."

Darling and the other men were dismounted and searching for explosives at the time of the car bombing, the Defense Department said.

"He was just a great person, a warm-hearted guy," Martina McCarey said. "He charmed everyone he met. My family loved him. He was trying to make his life better. Then, it just ended. It's very heart-breaking."

McCarey said she first met Darling in 1999 when they both worked in Quincy at Boston Financial, a mutual fund transfer agent. At the time, Darling, who worked as an account administrator, lived in Quincy, she said.

Darling was born Dec. 10, 1974, in Nassau, the Bahamas. He went to school there and came to the United States at age 19, she said.

He received citizenship after marrying a U.S. citizen. The marriage ended in divorce but Darling has a young daughter, Camryn Lee Darling, who lives with her mother in Florida, according to the McCarey family.

Diane McCarey said Darling's parents, Sydney and Madeleine Darling of Nassau, are flying to Massachusetts on Friday to attend their son's funeral and burial in Bourne.

Martina McCarey said she was in the Army Reserves for six years until her honorable discharge last year, and Darling became interested in serving as well during their time together.

"I put him in contact with a recruiter in Plymouth," she said. "He took the aptitude test and was fascinated by the opportunities to do different things in the military. After a couple of months of deliberating, he decided it was something he wanted to do. He was doing some soul-searching and wanted to find a career that he could enjoy."

Darling left for basic training on Jan. 29, 2003, at Fort Benning, Ga., and later completed his advanced individual and military occupation specialty training at Fort Sam Houston in San Antonio, Texas. He was the military equivalent of an emergency medical technician, according to Martina McCarey.

At the time of their deaths, Darling and the other men in his unit were assigned to the Army's 4th Battalion, 27th Field Artillery Regiment, 1st Armored Division, based in Baumholder, Germany.

The McCareys said Darling enjoyed karate and kick boxing and he had a black belt in one of the martial arts. He used to work out at Fit Corps on Heritage Drive in Quincy.

"He served as a physical trainer for some of his friends at the gyms," Martina McCarey said.

Both Diane and Martina McCarey called him a "people person."

"He was one of the kindest men I've ever met," said Diane McCarey. "Norman had the biggest smile. In the short time he was here, he made a lot of friends."

Darling went to neighborhood barbecues, talked to everyone, and went to movies and sporting events with the McCarey children, who include Robert, 26, William, 24, and Christine, 23.

At the time, Christine was a student at Springfield College and the McCareys and Darling enjoyed going to college sporting events.

Darling was also very close to Laura and Mike Wigold of Taunton and their young son, Brandon.

The news spread late Sunday that a man with Middleboro connections had been killed in Iraq. "I've been dreading this day," said Town Manager John F. Healy.

When Martina saw Darling at Christmas, he did not show any concerns about going to Iraq.

"He never showed any fear," she said. "He wanted to show us he was strong and everything would be OK."

As of Friday, 732 U.S. service members have died since the beginning of military operations in Iraq last year, according to the Department of Defense. Of those, 530 died as a result of hostile action and 202 died of non-hostile causes.

Darling is at least the 16th Massachusetts resident to die in the war on Iraq. Three others with local ties also have become casualties of the war.

Marine Lance Cpl. Jeffrey C. Burgess, 20, of Plymouth died in Iraq when his military vehicle ran over a mine and exploded on March 25.

Sgt. 1st Class Robert E. Rooney, 43, a former Plymouth resident and a member of the Massachusetts Army National Guard, died Sept. 25 in a non-combat accident in Kuwait.

On April 4, 2003, Marine 1st Lt. Brian McPhillips, 25, of Pembroke, was killed in a fire fight in Iraq during the first weeks of the war.