

JENNIFER M. BERKLEY, Gazette Staff Writer - 05/04/2004

TAUNTON -- A casualty of the war in Iraq hit home this week when a local woman learned her best friend, Army Pfc. Norman Darling, 29, was among eight soldiers killed by a car bomb just south of Baghdad.

"He was my bestest friend in the whole wide world," said Beacon Street resident Laura Weigold. "We had 10 years together and now he's my angel."

Weigold said she met Darling when the two worked at EquiServe in Canton and the two became fast friends. She said Darling was a friend she knew she could always count on. She asked him to be her "man of honor" in her November 2002 wedding and he graciously accepted.

"He was just an easy, laid-back, gentle guy ... he was my 'gentle giant,'" said Weigold.

Darling was killed on Thursday when a vehicle approached his patrol and detonated a bomb, according to the U.S. Department of Defense. His name, as well as those of his comrades, were released late Sunday night.

Darling was assigned to the Army's 4th Battalion, 27th Field Artillery Regiment, 1st Armored Division based in Germany.

Weigold said the details regarding Darling's funeral were incomplete last night.

A native of Nassau, the Bahamas, Darling came to the United States when he was 19 and became a citizen when he married an American. The marriage ended in divorce, but produced a daughter, Camryn Lee, who lived in Brockton with her mother until recently. The two now live in Florida.

Weigold said Darling was last home in December for Christmas, which he spent with her and her family in their new home. He also spent his time on leave with his daughter and friends in the Taunton area. He remained close to a former girlfriend's parents in Middleboro, Diane and Robert McCarey, whom he also spent time with in December.

"We're all grieving for him," said Weigold. "He was just an awesome guy."

Weigold said Darling was very committed to serving his country -- a decision he made only a short time ago. He left the Taunton area for basic training at Fort Benning, Ga. in January 2003.

"He had been contemplating it for years," said Weigold, referring to Darling's decision to enlist. "He felt it was something he had to do, but of course, I wasn't too happy about it. We were already fighting in a war."

Weigold said Darling enjoyed working out and weight-training, and had a black belt in karate. She said he was "just like one of her girlfriends" because he enjoyed shopping and "liked to look good."

She said Darling liked listening to jazz, going out to dance clubs and the beach.

"He was a very outgoing guy and he had a lot of friends," said Weigold. "He was an on-the-go type of person and always made time for his friends."

Weigold said it's not possible for her to say good-bye to Darling, not now, not ever.

"I'll always be thinking of him and he'll stay with me always. I'm not saying good-bye," she said. "I'll say, 'see you later.'"