

# No ill will from Bahamian dad in son's war death

By CASEY ROSS  
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Norman Darling's contact with his parents grew sporadic in the year before he died. He was living in a cold, faraway place called Quincy, and he had joined the Army in a country that was not his homeland.

Over the months, word came from Georgia and Texas and finally Germany, but Darling's parents, who live in the Bahamas, did not know where their son went next - until the phone rang one evening last week.

"I heard my wife scream out and I jumped out of bed and dashed into the front room," Sidney Darling said from the Bahamas yesterday. "I had trouble holding her. She was screaming, 'No, Norman, no,'"

She was so distraught because she had just learned that their son was killed fighting in the war in Iraq for a country that was not his homeland, for a place and a people he was, in some ways, still getting to know.

Norman Darling, 29, a private first class, was among eight U.S. soldiers killed Thursday in a suicide attack just south of Baghdad. The Pentagon said his unit was searching for roadside explosives when a vehicle approached and a bomb detonated.

Despite living in the United States for less than a third of his life - and in Quincy for about two years - Darling developed intense pride for his adopted country and a desire to protect the freedom of its people, friends and relatives said.

That pride was reflected yesterday in the words of his father, who sounded like so many American parents who have lost sons and daughters in Iraq. He spoke of his family's love for the United States and his son's dedication to his job in the military.

"Anything that happens to the United States happens to the Bahamas," Darling said. "I look at my son as a hero. He did what he was ordered to do, and he did it to the best of his ability."

Darling said his family lives a simple life in Nassau, the Bahamian capital. He drives a taxi and spends his free time with his wife and five other children, two daughters and three sons who have stayed close to home.

Norman was a different kind of child, he said. When he finished high school, he chose not to attend college in the Bahamas because he wanted to go to the United States. He became a citizen when he married an American girl, although that relationship ended in divorce.

It was nearly four years ago that Darling learned his son met another woman who gave birth to his daughter, Camryn Lee Darling, who lives in Florida with her mother.

"She is a beauty and I love her to death," Darling said, his voice breaking. "I have not seen her since she was a baby. I have to find her. She is the closest thing to me now because my son is gone. She is the only one to remind me."



**Pfc. Norman Darling**

Norman Darling lived in Brockton for a time in the late 1990s and then moved to Quincy, where he worked at Boston Financial. He had a girlfriend who served in the Army Reserve and became interested in serving in the military himself.

He left for basic training at Fort Benning, Ga., in January 2003 and later finished his training at Fort Sam Houston in San Antonio, Texas. The last phone call to his family was made early this year when he flew to Germany with the Army's 4th Battalion, 27th Field Artillery Regiment.

"He said he was tired because he had been traveling all day," Sidney Darling remembered. "He said, 'I love you, Mom, I love you, Dad.' ... And that was the last time we talked."

Darling said his family had always been proud of Norman for joining the Army, although they did not know of the dangers it would eventually force him to face. He was always an affectionate, outgoing boy who was athletic and good with people.

He liked Bruce Lee movies, his father said, and used to stand on one leg and practice martial arts kicks.

Darling said he was watching his grandchildren play together earlier in the evening he learned of his son's death. He was facing west and suddenly caught a glimpse of his son's face on the television screen.

He did not see enough of the newscast to know why his son's face was there, but it became clear when the phone call came later that evening as he drifted to sleep.

"It was the shock of my life, something I will never forget as long as I live," he said of the phone call and trying to calm his wife to learn what happened. "I will go to my grave thinking about it.

"My son had a job to do in the U.S. Army and he did that job," he added. "...God let me have my son for 30 years. My son died doing his best and I thank God for him."

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