

## Final honor: Quincy GI made an American before burial

By CASEY ROSS  
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BOURNE - Norman Darling died to protect freedoms he didn't have. He could not vote in the United States and its laws did not fully protect him. He could not have his relatives come live with him in Massachusetts or go home to the Bahamas without wondering if he would be allowed back into the country.

And yet, Darling, 29, joined the Army and was sent to Iraq, volunteering to fight for his adopted country.

In a mournful ceremony yesterday at the Massachusetts National Cemetery, Pfc. Darling became a U.S. citizen moments before his body was lowered into the ground.

"Your husband made the ultimate sacrifice for America. It is only fitting that we bestow on him our nation's ultimate honor," Gov. Mitt Romney said to Darling's wife, Kimberly.

Romney read from a letter written by Citizenship and Immigration Services in the wake of Darling's death. His family was given a framed certificate of his citizenship.

Darling was among eight soldiers killed in a suicide attack near Baghdad on April 29. His unit was searching for roadside explosives when a vehicle approached and the driver detonated a bomb.

Darling was the 14th non-citizen to be killed while fighting for the United States in Iraq. About 40,000 non-citizens serve in the military, and about 430 were living in Massachusetts when they signed up.

Friends and family said Darling joined the Army for the same reasons many immigrants do: -the opportunities it offers and to show his appreciation for his new country. He was born in the Bahamas and moved to the United States when he was 19, eventually marrying Kimberly Burch, an American woman.

Darling lived in Brockton in the late 1990s before moving to Quincy, where he worked at Boston Financial. In January, he was sent to Iraq with his Army unit, the 4th Battalion, 27th Field Artillery Regiment based in Germany.

His relatives, most still living in the Bahamas, did not know he was in Iraq until they were told he had died there.

As a blustery wind blew yesterday, they stood along a road in Massachusetts National Cemetery and watched as six soldiers lifted Darling's coffin from a hearse.

His 3-year-old daughter, Camryn, skipped along the road and swung from her grandparents' arms, causing warm smiles to flicker across their faces as the ceremony began.

Darling was awarded the Bronze Star and the Purple Heart for his service in Iraq, which included heroic actions on Feb. 15 that the Army would not detail yesterday. A general presented the medals to the family along with three crisply folded flags.

Camryn sat on her mother's lap and calmly held her flag as the general and the governor gently offered their thanks.

"Words are woefully inadequate in times like this," Romney said, reading from the letter. "But we would like you and your family to know that we as a nation share in mourning your loss."

After the services ended, two of Darling's brothers - he has three brothers and two sisters - talked about his sacrifice. They said they wished he could have been given his citizenship before he served in the military, although they said they understand U.S. policies.



**Camryn Darling, daughter of Army Pfc. Norman Darling, sits on the lap of her mother, Amy, and clutches the flag given to her during the funeral of her father, Norman Darling, at the Massachusetts National Cemetery in Bourne yesterday. (Associated Press)**

"I don't think it's ever worth it to lose someone like this," said Darling's brother, James, 36. "The only thing we're satisfied with is that Norman was happy. He loved doing it."

A military spokesman said the family was flown to the United States courtesy of the city of Watertown, where Kimberly Darling, from whom he had been separated for several years, resides. Before the couple separated, they lived in Mansfield.

Camryn lives in Florida with her mother.

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