

Broken for you

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The views expressed in this article are mine and do not represent the US Army.

Afghanistan, Wardak province, COP Sultan Kiehl OEF XII, I had only been at Combat Outpost Sultan Kiehl for an hour. I was visiting Battle and Fusion companies of the 2-503rd, 173d Airborne conducting Battle Field Circulation.

A big operation was in the works. Men from every section and company of the battalion were mobilizing to enter our biggest battle of the deployment, the closing and retrograde of COP Chalk.

I was in the HHC Command Post when we got news that a casualty was coming in. A patrol from Chosen Company had just left the wire and we were all caught off guard with the news.

After leaving the wire, they had gone only a few miles and encountered an enemy machinegun team. The world was a GSW to the head was the injury and we knew it was someone from the patrol.

I hurried over to the Aid Station. The PA and his team were preparing to receive our wounded soldier. The back door was propped open and I saw the MRAP tear into the gravel as it pulled up, tons of steel skidding to a halt. They brought SPC Justice in.

His head was bandaged and he was unconscious. The Doc and his team worked at an incredible pace, stabilizing him, and talking life saving measures. I stood at the head of the stretcher closest to SPC Justice's head. Blood and brain matter were splattered on the stretcher. Blood dripped onto the floor by my feet. The docs were working all around me, the 1SGs for Battle and HHC were present with somber looks of pain across their faces.

I prayed aloud, "Lord save his soul and spare his life." I read from Psalm 23 and then I leaned forward and uttered words of comfort in SPC Justice's ear.

It was time to go, the docs packaged him up and the bumpy ride was made from the Aid Station to the Helicopter Landing Zone on a John Deer Gator. SPC Justice began a long trip following the trail of blood and brokenness that took him to FOB Shank, Bagram Airfield, and on to Landstuhl.

His wife and children were rushed from Vicenza, Italy to Landstuhl near Frankfurt, Germany. It was there at the hospital that SPC Justice went to be with God.

He was a Christian and a good soldier. During our pre-mission training he won an award for his outstanding performance during the training exercise and was recognized by all the officers, sergeants, and

observer controllers with the "Hero of Hohenfels" award.

Calvary Baptist Church, San Francisco 2014

My dad committed his life to Christ 50 years ago through the ministry of Calvary Baptist Church and so he had asked me to visit it while I was in San Francisco. It was communion Sunday.

As the pastor led us through the elements, my thoughts ran me back through the images of broken bodies, blood, and the excruciating pain people experienced going through during my deployment.

Luke 22:19 "This is my body which is given for you..." I thought of SPC Justice's broken body.

Luke 22:20 "This cup which is poured out for you is the new covenant in My blood..." I thought of the blood shed in that conflict. Communion for me will never be the same.

I have a reference; I have seen some human suffering. Maybe it gives me a taste, a hint of what Jesus felt. Of what Christ went through to give me eternal life. He shed his blood to forgive me of my sin, He took my place.

The Army is big on ceremonies, we held SPC Justice's Memorial Ceremony at COP Sultan Kiehl with many of his brothers in attendance. His platoon had driven all Night, the twelve hours one way from COP Dosh Towpe and cleared the road passing by the same spot where they had engaged the Taliban machinegun team on their way to the ceremony. It was a beautiful ceremony filled with emotion, sadness, and celebration of SPC Justice's life.



An Army carry team moves a transfer case containing the remains of Spc. James A. Justice Sunday, Aug. 19, 2012 at Dover Air Force Base, Del. According to the Department of Defense, Justice, 21, of Grover, N.C., died Aug. 17, 2012 at Landstuhl Regional Medical Center in Germany from injuries sustained from enemy small-arms fire Aug. 14, 2012 in Wardak province, Afghanistan. (AP Photo/Steve Ruark)

Jesus told us how we were to remember him. He established and rehearsed his own memorial ceremony; He even called it that, a memorial. He wanted us to physically eat bread and drink wine so that we would never forget the freedom He bought for us at great cost.

