

Grieving Parents Find Comfort in Each Other

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BY Elizabeth M. Lorge

WASHINGTON (Army News Service, Oct. 11, 2007) - Losing a child in war is like losing an appendage, said two military wives and mothers whose sons have made the ultimate sacrifice in Iraq during the third and final Family Forum at the Association of the United States Army Annual Meeting Wednesday.

Retired Marine Sgt. Maj. David and Deborah Tainsh lost Sgt. Patrick Tainsh in Iraq in February 2004 when his convoy suffered an improvised-explosive device and rocket-propelled grenade attack outside the Baghdad Airport. Severely wounded, he fired over 400 rounds with two guns and waited until the battle ended before telling his commander of his injuries and dying. He received the Silver Star for his actions. Mrs. Tainsh immortalized their story in "Heart of a Hawk," a journey of healing.

Maj. Gen. (then Col.) Mark and Carol Graham's son Kevin was an ROTC cadet who committed suicide in 2003. His older brother Jeffery, already a lieutenant, was offered a stateside assignment, but he wanted to serve his country in Iraq. He died seven months after his brother, also in February 2004.

"I can remember so clearly that morning. I'd gotten up about five a.m., only to find on the internet that two Soldiers had been killed. I asked Mark if we would know by now if it was Jeffery or not. Deep in my spirit, I had a feeling it was him, but the rational side of my brain could not even begin to think that it could be our son. It could just not be true. Not again," said Mrs. Graham.

"I was well trained in deployments and support groups during my husband's career but sending a child to war is an experience that has no expression," said Mrs. Tainsh. "You have to be a parent to understand because parents give life to protect that life. We never expect our babies to go out to protect us. For us and those like us, our worlds have been changed forever."

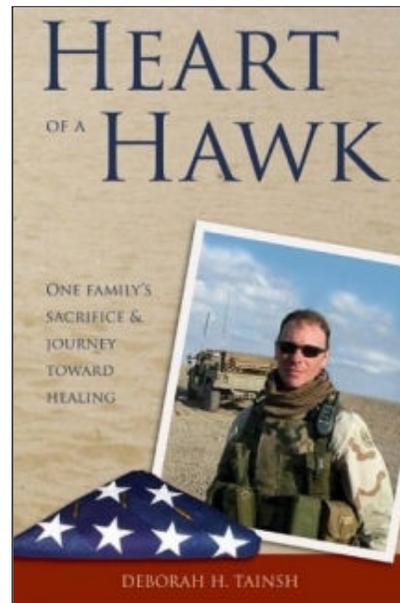
She said they have lost the future: they'll never plan their son's wedding or have grandchildren. They've also grown apart from his fiancée, who was once like a daughter to them. They don't even put a tree up at Christmas anymore.

Mrs. Graham added that while their friends' children graduated, married and had children, they wondered why the world kept spinning without their sons, and that they would cry in church when the prayers of others were answered.

Mrs. Tainsh said the worst question she and her husband get is if they will have any other children. She doesn't understand why this matters. She said another grieving mother tells others: "Think of a car. The car runs great with four good tires, but if one tire blows, it's absolutely useless. The great difference is that a car tire can be replaced."

Both she and Mrs. Graham have found solace in the arms of others who have suffered great tragedy and, in turn, worked through their grief by helping other bereaved parents.

Mrs. Graham said that she and her husband initially struggled with whether he should retire, but then realized that they may be able to help other Families.



Deborah Tainsh wrote "Heart of a Hawk" about her son's life, death in battle and their journey of healing. Photo by [Author](#).

"More Soldiers died in Iraq, others died in car accidents or by suicide and it occurred to us that maybe this was the reason we were called to continue to serve. We personally knew the pain these families were feeling and we could genuinely connect in a way we never could have before. As we tried to comfort the broken hearts of the people God put in our path, an amazing phenomenon occurred -- these precious people helped us more than we helped them."

Mrs. Tainsh said she and her husband were lost for more than a year until they found Tragedy Assistance Program for Survivors, a nonprofit which connected them with other parents and Families.

"TAPS was the blessing that gave Dave and me what we needed and finally placed our lives on a track with a definite purpose," Mrs. Tainish said. "We connected with parents and other family members and found our new family, where we were bonded through our grief."

Both she and her husband have trained to help other families through TAPS and all of her book's proceeds go to the organization.

"Four or five years ago if someone had told us we could survive the death of even one of our children, I would not have believed it," said Mrs. Graham. "People ask us all the time: how do you do it? Even after four years, many mornings I wake up thinking this is all a bad dream, but we were so blessed and so honored to have had such amazing sons and remind ourselves continually that they were a gift. We did nothing to deserve them and so our attitude must always be one of gratitude that we even had them at all.

"It does not take away the pain, but it somehow puts light around the darkness and gives us the strength and courage to keep on living. We've learned that the more grateful our hearts are, the more we're filled with compassion for the needs of others. We're grateful to live on the best nation on this planet and be part of our wonderful Army Family," she said.