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## Marine Corps News

# 'Purple Foxes' remember brethren

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By *Lance Cpl. Thomas J. Griffith*, 2nd Marine Logistics Group



Servicemembers with Marine Medium Helicopter Squadron 364 gathered at the Al Taqaddum Mainside Chapel to remember six fallen 'Purple Foxes' Feb. 11. The four Marines and two sailors gave their lives in support of Operation Iraqi Freedom while they were conducting casualty evacuation operations near Fallujah, Feb. 7.



A memorial was held at the Al Taqaddum Mainside Chapel Feb. 11 to honor six fallen servicemembers with Marine Medium Helicopter Squadron 364.





Servicemembers with Marine Medium Helicopter Squadron 364 gathered at the Al Taqaddum Mainside Chapel to remember six of their fellow 'Purple Foxes', Feb. 11. The four Marines and two corpsmen gave their lives in support of Operation Iraqi Freedom during casualty evacuation operations outside of Fallujah, Feb. 7.

**AL TAQADDUM, Iraq (Feb. 11, 2007)** -- Servicemembers gathered at the Mainside Chapel here to remember six fallen comrades Feb. 11.

Captain Jennifer J. Harris, 1st Lt. Jared M. Landaker, Petty Officer 1st Class Gilbert Minjares Jr., Sgt. Travis D. Pfister, Sgt. James R. Tijerina and Petty Officer 3rd Class Manuel A. Ruiz of Marine Medium Helicopter Squadron 364 gave their lives in support of Operation Iraqi Freedom Feb. 7.

The Marines and sailors were on a casualty evacuation mission near Fallujah when the CH-46E "Sea Knight" helicopter they were flying in crashed.

The cause of the crash is still under investigation.

"They understood that (casualty evacuation) missions are the no. 1, cannot fail missions of OIF," said Lt. Col. Sean C. Killeen, commanding officer of HMM-364. "It's the most noble mission in Marine aviation, placing yourself in harm's way for a wounded Marine, soldier or sailor on the field of battle."

The memorial began with the national anthem and opening hymn, 'Amazing Grace.' The hymn was followed by a reading of Psalms 23 and the commander's comments. The eulogies shortly followed.

Captain Brian C. Santucci, a friend and co-worker of Harris', read the eulogy for Harris. He said he knew Harris for almost 11 years, and she always had a smile on her face.

"I don't want you to remember that she died," he said. Santucci pointed to a photograph of Harris being displayed by a projector. "I want you to look at this picture. I want you to see this smile, because that smile is who she was. She was a great pilot and was always working too hard."

Harris, a 28-year-old Salem, Mass., native, and CH-46E pilot, is survived by her parents, Raymond and Rosalie.

A friend and co-worker read the eulogy for Landaker. First Lt. Gareth G. Liftin said Landaker was the type of guy people wanted to be with.

He was confident, determined and dedicated, said Liftin.

"For as hard as Jared worked, he definitely played with the same intensity," he said referring to Landaker's off-duty, free time habits.

Landaker, a 25-year-old Big Bear City, Calif., native, and CH-46E pilot, is survived by his parents, Joseph and Laura, and brother, Jason.

A friend and co-worker read the eulogy for Minjares.

"In his own special way, he guided us and took care of us as any good father would," said Petty Officer 2nd Class Hermin A. Acosta.

Minjares, a 31-year-old El Paso, Texas, native, and corpsman, is survived by his wife, Jeannie, son, Gilbert Minjares III, and daughter, Miranda.

A close friend of Pfister read a letter he wrote for him.

"Travis, I know there's probably a better time to do this," began Sgt. Brian C. Dinning. "It's truly my honor to be able to call you my friend.

"You have been a model for all people to emulate. Your reputation as a man and as a Marine still casts a shadow ten times a man's size."

Pfister, a 27-year-old Richland, Wash., native, and CH-46E crew chief, is survived by his wife, Jessica.

Sergeant Miles P. Wilson said a few words about his friend Tijerina.

Wilson said he met Tijerina during Marine Combat Training and had been friends with him ever since.

"J.R. became the closest and dearest friend I've ever had," he said.

Most people will remember Tijerina by his sense of humor, said Wilson.

Tijerina, a 26-year-old Houston native, and CH-46E crew chief, is survived by his wife, Clowlee.

A friend and co-worker of Ruiz commented on the 21-year-old corpsman.

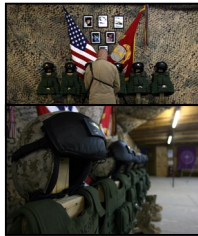
Petty Officer 3rd Class C.M. Holzworth said Ruiz sometimes acted like Scarface and was fascinated with Superman.

"He always tried to make us laugh, but was also a sincere and loving person, especially when talking about his family and brothers," he added. "He always made time for his brothers."

Ruiz, a Rota, Spain, native, is survived by his mother, Lisa, and two brothers, Joshua and Jacob.

"Perhaps this is the price we pay for combating evil," concluded Killeen. "The lives of good men and women are required to keep evil at bay. It's a heavy price that they have paid. It's not for us to know God's design or purpose. What we can do is draw from this loss and honor those that perished."

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A memorial was held at the Al Taqaddum Mainside Chapel Feb. 11 to honor six fallen servicemembers with Marine Medium Helicopter Squadron 364. Photo by: Lance Cpl. Thomas J. Griffith



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