

Courtney Kokx  
The Heart of a Soldier

It was 3 o' clock a.m. when we heard a violent pound on the door and sudden doorbell rings. "What could someone possibly want at this time?" my mind wondered, as I quickly rolled back over, not knowing what awaited me from my dream. Soon enough I heard the cry of my mother and my father's shaken voice. My sister and I walked down the stairs to figure out what the reason for all the ruckus was. As I made my adventure my heart was pounding, and my hands clammy. They then pronounced to us the death of our soon to be brother-in-law.

The harder part was to come; telling the one whose future would be changed forever.

We traveled to Central Michigan University as quickly as possible, hoping to arrive before the news did. We failed. My mom's phone rang not very far from campus. Her curious voice asked my mom, hoping for the answer she wanted, " Mom, what's going on? Trent's (Brett's brother) Facebook status says, "Rest in peace Brett Witteveen"?" All she could do was say, "Yes, we will be there in 20 minutes."

The look in her eyes said enough for me, while scrambled words came out of my parents' voices as they retold the tragedy. My sister let loose, spilling every feeling she had without saying a word. I searched for comforting things to say, realizing that there weren't any.

A Marine right out of high school for two years, attached to Alpha Company, 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion, 24<sup>th</sup> regiment, 20 years old, Brett Witteveen, killed February 18<sup>th</sup> on duty.

Before any person can truly be in the military they must go through boot camp and tons of training for when the day comes to be sent over on a long plane ride. They run miles daily, chanting the whole way. They are tested frequently on all safety and situational scenes. For instance, all of the soldiers were locked in a gas chamber having a very short amount of time to place gear on. A command would be given and then in single file order the men would proceed out. As the men got to fresh air they would vomit, and have watering eyes.

The rules during boot camp most of the time required few phone calls, making it a slim chance to talk to your lover frequently. The last day they spoke was on Valentine's Day; another holiday spent alone, yet the conversation never forgotten.

In Iraq, Brett and the rest of the soldiers would get up at the crack of dawn to complete their duties. They worked in the dirt all day, patrolling all areas, searching cars, and being security. Daily they would be shot at or have bombs going off around them. On February 18<sup>th</sup>, Brett was leading his platoon when he stepped on a bomb set by the Iraqis. The soldiers have trackers that can locate the bombs, which the soldiers then attempt to detach. They know the consequences if something goes wrong. Yet every day they continue risking their lives for us sitting at home.

A couple soldiers from Brett's platoon had the duty to remain proudly with his body until it safely arrived home, and then burial.

I remember approaching Brett's casket. The soldiers stared forward as many family and friends paying their respect passed in and out. When my family and I were paying our last respects it got very emotional. I glanced at the man in uniform overlooking the casket, to watch a tear drop come crashing down, but he remained in formal and looked on forward.

Without any question at all, it is clear that a soldier is the definition of courage. The bravery of every day going out to wonder if this may be your last day. Having best friends fall beside you, as you can't lift them up any longer. To still have the belief that going out the next day will bring something more for your country. To have your loved ones millions of miles away, but only a thought away.

This could only be handled with the courage in every one of them. It takes strength, willingness to fight back, and unafraid individuals to do the job, and that's who is the definition of courage. Soldiers.