

# Airman's Father: 'I'm Glad They Got Him'

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The father of a New Mexico man who was among the first service members killed in the decade-long campaign against al-Qaida and Osama bin Laden warned Americans on Monday not to become complacent about threats to the nation.

"I just hope that people don't think that the whole Taliban organization and the al-Qaida bunch is going to fall apart just because they got bin Laden," said Larry "Red" Cunningham of Gallup, whose son was killed in 2002 during an early battle of

the war in Afghanistan.

Jason Cunningham, 26, was fatally wounded March 4, 2002, during a desperate firefight with Taliban and al-Qaida fighters as he tried to rescue a Navy SEAL who had fallen from a helicopter.

A member of the Air Force's elite pararescue unit known as "PJs," Cunningham provided medical treatment under fire for seven hours and helped save 10 wounded servicemen



**J. CUNNING-  
HAM:**  
**Killed in  
Afghanistan**

# Airman's Dad Says, 'I'm Glad They Got Him'

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despite having been shot twice himself.

The Carlsbad native bled to death before crews on rescue helicopters could save him.

The Air Force posthumously awarded Cunningham its highest honor, the Air Force Cross, in September 2002. In 2004, Moody Air Force Base in Georgia named its Airman Leadership School in his honor.

The senior Cunningham said he shared the national euphoria that erupted Sunday night when Americans learned of the helicopter raid in Pakistan that resulted in bin Laden's death.

"I'm glad they got him," Larry Cunningham said in a telephone interview Monday. "There have been far too many people die over there hunting him down."

He also said he's certain his son would have shared in the celebration.

But Americans shouldn't consider bin Laden's death an end to the hatred he inspired against the United States.

"He's just one person, but there's a hundred of them standing in line waiting to take his place," Larry Cunningham said.

"I hope people don't get too complacent and think that it's over with, because it's really just another chapter. I know we haven't seen the end of it."

Jason Cunningham was killed during Operation Anaconda, a mission to drive out Taliban and al-Qaida fighters entrenched in the mountains of eastern Afghanistan. The operation resulted in some of the bloodiest early fighting in the war.

Cunningham served as a pararescueman trained to rescue downed pilots in enemy areas. He grew up in Carlsbad and Farmington, graduating from Farmington High School in 1994 before serving four

years in the Navy.

He qualified for training as a Navy SEAL, the elite unit involved in the raid that killed bin Laden. But Cunningham felt drawn to medical rescue and switched to the Air Force to join the "PJs."

"I didn't want to kill people," Jason Cunningham told *Airman* magazine, an Air Force publication, in 2000. "I wanted to save them."

The senior airman was stationed at Moody with his wife, Theresa, and two daughters before his deployment to Afghanistan in February 2002.

Larry Cunningham said he and his wife, Jackie Cunningham, have learned to live with their son's loss, but don't find anything resembling "closure" from bin Laden's death.

"When you are parents and you lose one of your kids, what is closure?" he said. "I still haven't really discovered it, and neither has my wife."



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Pallbearers carry the casket of Senior Airman Jason Cunningham for burial at Arlington National Cemetery on March 14, 2002. Cunningham was killed in Afghanistan during early fighting.