

Father's Obituary

Jason D. Cunningham was born the second child to two very proud parents. Red and Jackie Cunningham, in Kaufman, Texas on March 27, 1975. With his umbilical cord wrapped twice around his neck, Jason showed the will and determination that would define his life. The family moved to Carlsbad, New Mexico two weeks later where Jason spent most of his youth.

Always a charmer and eager to learn and excel at whatever he tried, Jason formed special friendships with people he admired and whom he felt had something to teach him. Jason's mother's good friend Judy Norman, taught him horseback riding and encouraged him to compete. Joan, his swim coach saw his potential and had him winning awards at school meets. Michael Lee, a local store owner in New Mexico, took Jason under his wing and soon he was winning Jet Ski competitions. Throughout his childhood, Jason was interested in the military and guns, going so far as to eat MREs by choice.

After high school, Jason left for the Navy with the Navy SEALs on his mind. As honor graduate in Tech School he chose Naples, Italy as his first duty station. There Jason's dedication and sheer zest for life brought him recognition and success. He was chosen to run track for the Armed Forces team competing in Germany. He began training in Tae Kwon Do and moved quickly through the ranks. As a 1st Dan Blackbelt, Jason represented the University of Maryland European Division and won 2 silver medals for sparring and forms at the 1995 National Collegiate's held in New York City.

Jason had made the decision during basic training that the Navy SEAL mission wasn't quite right for him, but rescue was still his calling. In Naples he became the key liaison between the civilian firefighters and the military volunteer firefighters earning a Navy Commendation Medal for putting out a wildfire on the 4th of July which threatened miles of park and as well as the lives of numerous civilians and military personnel attending the annual fireworks show.

At the end of his 2nd year in Naples. Jason met the woman he would soon marry. As in all things, Jason knew what he wanted and gave his all. After 1 month of daring he told Theresa, "You're going to marry me, aren't you." five months later they were married and a year and a half after that they welcomed their first child, Kyla Meghan Cunningham

Jason continued as a volunteer firefighter and lifeguard and taught Tae Kwon Do to ages 5 thru 18. Before leaving Naples in June of 1998, Jason earned 2 Navy and Marine Corps Achievement Medals, the NATO Medal, a joint forces medal, Blue Jacket of the Quarter, and the respect of the military and civilian community from the base Commander on down. Many of whom considered Jason a personal friend.

Jason returned to New Mexico and processed out of the Navy. By December of that year, Jason's drive to serve the military in search and rescue brought him to the Air Force Pararescue program. He passed the two Initial tests and in March of 1999 Jason reentered the military as a trainee in what he considered the best and most challenging of special forces communities. Jason spent the next two and a half years in jump school, dive school, survival school, medical schools and various other schools, learning and competing among the best the joint military forces had to offer. He distinguished himself among his peers as a team player with a great attitude. His quick smile and enthusiasm about life are remembered by everyone who met him. From the over one hundred trainees

who started with him, Jason was one of only ten graduates who put on their maroon berets in June of 2001.

During his 2+ years of Pararescue training, Jason found a focus for his drive and dedication. He and Theresa had a new baby, Hannah, and they looked forward to their first Air Force duty station with the 38th RQS at Moody AFB in Valdosta, GA. There for eight months, Jason made many friends who remember him always smiling and constantly asking more training to improve his skills.

When he left for Afghanistan on February 5th he was part of a small, well trained special ops combat medics. He was sad to leave his wife and young girls but eager to do the job he had been training for, in a sense, his whole life. Within a week, Jason performed his first combat save on the crew of a downed C-130. Two and a half weeks later, Operation Anaconda began. Jason died knowing many would live because of his actions. Some would say he was destined for greatness. Jason was a beloved son, and brother, the best of husbands, and an irreplaceable father.