



Sgt. Eric Duling presents a flag to Alfonzo Boyd.

Photo by Layla Farmer

A Short Life Remembered

Family grieves the loss of Navy Petty Officer 3rd Class LaMario Clemmons

BY LAYLA FARMER
THE CHRONICLE

The memory of one of Winston-Salem's own was honored in a brief, somber ceremony last Thursday afternoon.

Alfonzo Boyd was presented with a flag in remembrance of his son, the late LaMario Clemmons at the Navy recruiting office in Hanes Mall. Clemmons, an alumnus of West Forsyth High School, passed away Sept. 24 at the age of 23.

Clemmons joined the Navy in 2005, after a brief stint at Appalachian State University. He was a third generation Armed Forces member. Boyd, a former Marine, said he was proud to see his son follow in his footsteps.



Clemmons

"It's more than work; this is really the finest country on earth. It's a beacon of light to the world," Boyd declared. "It's more than an honor to serve in any branch of the Armed Forces."

Also grieving the loss of their son are Clemmons' mother, Cynthia Clemmons Williams, and his stepfather, Matthew Williams, who raised LaMario Clemmons.

Boyd and his son had not been in contact for some time, a fact that added to the pain he felt over LaMario's death.

Clemmons had been an athlete for much of his life, starting from the time when he was a Winston-Salem Tiny Indian Pop Warner football star. He also played in the Twin City Little League and on a youth basketball squad at the Winston Lake Family YMCA.

Singing and performing were also his passions. Clemmons performed under the name "Soy-O-Boy."

The few years he had in the Navy were very active. He spent time in Panama, Cuba, Ecuador and Spain. During his time in Africa, he received a letter of Commendation for Outstanding Seamanship and Performance.

Presenting the flag to the family members of fallen servicemen is a long standing tradition, and a token of

the military's appreciation for those who serve.

"It's just our way of showing that their son's service was important to us; he wasn't just a number," explained Sgt. Eric Duling, who presented the flag to Boyd. "We present the flag as a sign of respect to the entire nation, that we grieve his passing."

Duling, who works out of the Reserve center in Greensboro, worked closely with the family, helping to plan Clemmons' funeral service, which included full military honors.

Clemmons' mother received a flag as well during the funeral service.

"It's kind of a double edged sword," Duling said of the duty. "It feels terrible having to break that kind of news ... but on the other hand, it feels really nice to assist the family in their time of need ... we've become friends outside of the Navy as well."

Clemmons' paternal grandmother, Janie Autrey, and great uncle, Kevin Mosley, accompanied Boyd at the ceremony.

"I wanted to be here to support my son in getting this honor in memory of his son, who will be greatly missed," she said. "In his short life, (Clemmons) accomplished much."

Autrey, whose two sons were both in the military and served during the Gulf War, said she has learned a lot from watching her sons and grandson.

"Through them, I learned that that flag belongs to each of us - we're all Americans," she stated. "There was a time when I didn't believe that, but I learned to respect the flag (from them). It's my flag too."

The presentation was poignant for Boyd, who stood at attention as Duling extended the Stars and Stripes to him.

"It really made my heart flutter; I was really honored," he commented.

Though he has witnessed many such ceremonies before as a Marine, Boyd said he was unprepared for the barrage of emotions that struck him as he held the

carefully folded flag.

"When you see one for your own flesh and blood, it lands home," he said. "...I felt a big lump in my throat, but I'm extraordinarily proud."

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Firefighters

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Roanoke-Wildwood Volunteer Fire Department, died of a heart attack while preparing to respond to a residential structure fire on March 16, 2008.

Firefighter Carol Taylor, 41, of the Goldsboro Fire Department, died within 24 hours of responding to an electrical fire on Nov. 15, 2008.

Second Assistant Chief



Taylor

Colin Thomas, 52, of the Verona (NC) Volunteer Fire Department, died after being struck by a vehicle in zero visibility conditions at a wildland fire on June 14, 2008.

According to the National Fallen Firefighters Foundation, 103 firefighters died in the line of duty in 2008, making firefighting one of the nation's most dangerous occupations. During the ceremony, families of the deceased received flags flown over the U.S. Capitol and the National Firefighters Memorial.

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