

Joseph Frederick Fuerst III

July 20, 1979 – June 24, 2006

Joseph F. Fuerst III was born July 20<sup>th</sup>, 1979 in Tampa, FL at Women's Hospital, weighing 2lbs 9 ounces. Joe's premature birth determined his will to live, as he fought for 3 months against the odds. Joe went home with his parents once he reached 4lbs 5 ounces.

As a young boy, Joe and his brother Brian attended Christ the King School. In first grade he joined Boy Scouts as a Tiger Cub and continued with the scouting program even after attaining the rank of Eagle Scout. As a member of Christ the King youth group, he attended several national Catholic youth group conventions. In 7<sup>th</sup> grade, Joe became an altar server and continued until he graduated from high school.

After graduating from Christ the King in 8<sup>th</sup> grade Joe went on to H.B. Plant High School in Tampa, FL. Joe remained active in Scouting and youth group activities during his high school years. Joe was a member of the Plant Panthers swim and dive team. Joe was also an active member of the Plant Chorus group. During his high school years, he established a lawn business. Joe graduated Plant High School in 1998.

Joe was always energetic, he had to be active and loved being outside doing things, his favorite activities included air boating, four wheeling, mudding, camping, and traveling. Joe loved spending time with his family and taking his nieces on outings.

After high school, Joe enrolled at Hillsborough Community College. After 2 semesters of college, Joe decided to join the United States Army. Following basic training and advanced individual training at Ft. Benning, GA as an Airborne Infantryman, Joe was stationed at Ft. Bragg with the 82<sup>nd</sup> Airborne Division. His first overseas deployment took him to Kosovo for 6 months. Joe was then sent to Camp Greaves, Korea, one mile from the DMZ for 15 months.

After completing active duty, Joe returned to Tampa and joined the Florida Army National Guard where he met Tara. He then went on to complete his AA and AS degree in Criminal Justice, and then graduated from the Police Academy. Joe and Tara were married in March 2005, just prior to their deployment to Afghanistan.

Staff Sergeant Fuerst's medals and awards include Expert Marksmanship qualification badge with rifle bar, Expert Marksmanship badge with grenade bar, Parachutist badge, Drivers badge, Army Achievement Medal, Army Good Conduct Medal, Army Commendation Medal, National Defense Service Medal, Army Reserve Component Achievement Medal, Army Service Medal, Overseas Service Ribbon, NATO Medal (Service in former Yugoslavia), Kosovo Campaign Medal with 1 Bronze Service Star, The Florida Cross, Combat Infantryman Badge, Purple Heart and Bronze Star Medal with V Device.

The evening of 24 June 2006, during Operation Mountain Thrust, Joe was leading a group of the 1<sup>st</sup> BDE, 205<sup>th</sup> Corps Afghan National Army soldiers when he was killed in action (KIA) by enemy forces in the Panjwayi District of Kandahar Province in Afghanistan.