

## My Military Hero

I was just a young, freckled faced girl in a camouflage uniform in 2006 when I first heard the name of my military hero. I was in the CSRA Young Marines when my platoon was asked to be present at a memorial for a Marine who had died in the line of duty. I was a member of the Color Guard and proudly marched the American flag down the stone pathway. I remember seeing the tears streaming down the faces of the bystanders and my heart ached. As the memorial continued, stories were told about this honorable man. As each word was spoken, my respect for him grew. Even now when I hear his name, pride explodes from my heart. He was a strong and dedicated person.

Matt Dillon was born December 28, 1980 and attended schools in the same county I live in today. His mother and father told tales (with a smile) of his lack of motivation when it came to his education. He managed to make decent grades and graduated from Wardlaw High School in 1999. He signed up for the South Carolina National Guard and attended Aiken Technical College until 2003 when he was called to duty. Matthew was deployed to Operation Iraqi Freedom, operating as a Combat engineer. During his one year deployment Matthew was injured while on a patrol mission when his vehicle was hit by a roadside bomb. He returned safely from Iraq in 2004 and was awarded a Purple Heart from the Army for injuries received while in combat.

Matthew had found his calling and despite being in the Army National Guard, had a burning desire to become a Marine. In 2005, he was released from the Army National Guard, more than willing to start over in rank to become a Marine. He was extremely motivated in boot camp and quitting was not in his vocabulary. His father spoke of how Matt injured his ankle during the "Crucible", the culmination of the Marine Corps boot camp that involves days of sleep deprivation and strenuous activity. Although in excruciating pain, Dillon didn't report

his injury to his leaders because he was determined to graduate with his comrades. He graduated from Marine Boot Camp and was awarded a "Certificate of Commendation" for outstanding performance. This resulted in his selection as "Marine of the Quarter" for which he was in competition with 500 other Marines. Dillon graduated from Marine Combat training school and Military Police school and was assigned to Marine Air Wing Unit MWSS 373, Miramar CA. Because of his outstanding service record and professionalism, he was quickly promoted to the Non Commissioned Officer rank of Corporal, in the short time period of 16 months. He was again deployed to Operation Iraqi Freedom with MWSS 373, serving as a Military Policeman fire team leader for Havoc II.

Corporal Matthew Dillon received the one of the highest honors, he was selected to serve on the President's Security team in Washington, DC effective March, 2007. Unfortunately, he didn't get that chance. He was killed in action on December 11, 2006. Matthew and Havoc II were conducting a combat mission when their Humvee was hit by a large roadside bomb. Corporal Dillon died alongside two other Marines. The news came to his parents and the entire county wept. Corporal Matthew Dillon exhibited a zest for life and love of country that was beyond compare.

Years have passed, but the memory of CPL Matthew Dillon has remained in our hearts. I have attended many programs in his honor and am emotionally touched every time. Whenever I speak to his parents, I am honored to know the family of this great Marine. He defines the meaning of Honor, Courage, and Commitment. I only hope that in my lifetime, I can be half the soldier that my hero was in his.

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