

he was my son's best friend, he was an infantryman, and he was a teacher. That was good enough for me." (David T. Childress, Ph.D., Jacksonville).

**Bill Eggers, 59, of Cape Coral, is a retired police lieutenant and Vietnam veteran. His son, Army Special Forces Capt. Dan Eggers (a Green Beret), was killed in action on May 29, 2004, in Afghanistan.**



Daniel Eggers, 28

"Time heals a lot of wounds. But I never thought I would be so vulnerable to pain, especially to losing a family member that was in the service. I thought I'd be able to chalk it up to honor and country. I was a door gunner in Vietnam, and I thought I was hard-assed about my son. If the plug was pulled, he was a warrior, too. That doesn't make it any different, though, it just makes it a whole hell of a lot more personal. But I guess you have to be there, in order to feel what this is like every day.

"Had my son died in Vietnam and you asked the same question, Was it worth it? I would have told you, absolutely not. Vietnam didn't have the same reasons.

"But 9/11 really changed our whole family. 9/11 was my generation's Pearl Harbor. The terrorism committed on our domestic soil was just like Pearl Harbor. Despite the shoulda-coulda-woulda, our president made the right decision to get to the root and the heart of the problem by going into Afghanistan. It wasn't a fishing expedition. And it makes me feel for the parents of children who die (fighting terrorism), that at least their children died for valid reasons.

"So to other Americans I'd just say, we have to honor (the troops) whenever we see them — or thank them. And don't ever forget that. Because without that, you're nothing.

"I would say about my family: We're probably a little more religious than the ordinary family, and Danny was torn about what he wanted to do. He asked my wife in junior high school, once, 'Mom, can you be a priest and be in the Army at the same time?' We still choke up about that sometimes.

"I spent 20 years trying to forget Vietnam. Then beginning about 1991, with the Clinton presidency, I spent the next 15 years trying to remember it. I put up my medals next to my computer, and did other stuff. And sometimes I think maybe Danny tried to emulate me, although I never told any one of my kids what to do, or tried to push them in a particular direction.

"I can honestly say, I don't think there's one day something about Danny hasn't crossed my mind. I pass a church every day, and every day I bless myself, and my son. "We have six kids, and Danny was the oldest. He would have been 31 — my youngest is 14. After he died, my wife told me that Danny was the cement that held these kids together. If they ever had any questions, they called Danny. And then they called Dad.

"After my wife, I guess he was my best friend."

**Lisa Shanaberger Fischer, 52, of Naples, is a charter-boat fishing captain, and the aunt of Staff Sergeant Wentz "Baron" Shanaberger, of Naples, who served as a military policeman with the 18th Airborne Corps. She also volunteers in organizations that take care**



Wentz Shanaberger, 33

**of troops returning from overseas, and the families of troops who don't return. She attends every funeral of every service member from Lee or Collier counties who is killed overseas. Fischer and her family met with President Bush, at his request, following her nephew's death. SSgt. Shanaberger was killed in action on March 24, 2004, in Iraq.**

"My nephew was 100-percent career soldier. Even if we disagreed, we never brought that into the equation. He believed in his commander-and-chief, he believed in the mission, and he was very good at what he did.

"I don't believe it gets easier, but to the best of our ability we deal with it. And what we do with our grief has changed. I was close with my nephew. We were involved with his wife and children.

"Baron's dad, my brother Butch, was a Marine in Vietnam, and he saw a lot of bad things. It got so he wouldn't even come home on leave (from Vietnam) — he just went to Okinawa. So this was very difficult for him, for both of Baron's parents. They struggled a great deal. Their main source of comfort is staying involved with veterans. His mother's involved in doing a yearly run, in collecting scholarships for the children of families who have lost dads or moms. It has meant taking action.

"What's hard to me isn't so much my nephew's death — he died saving 47 people in a long convoy. He led the convoy, and it was interrupted by a heavily armed ambush. He took care of business and he lost his life for it. But being in the company of these soldiers — they're an all-volunteer army. They're going toward the danger, not running away from it."

"Naples has lost three soldiers, now: My nephew, Stan Lipinski in 2005, and Brandon Gordon. I tell you what: when you pick up the phone to call them, that phone weighs 500 pounds."

"Getting involved has helped our family heal, and honor his life. It was not in vain, ever. He could just as easily have died in Kosovo or Panama, and if he'd died in a car accident he would have been really pissed.

Barron would have been 36 on September 16.

"The Army reached out to our family at such a personal level — this man came down, spent three days in our community, to speak for memorial day.

"Corey (Baron's wife) was such a great representative of the Shanaberger family. She took (Baron's four children) and moved back to Australia; that's where her people are from."

**Brad Gordon, 21, a junior at Florida State University, is a criminology and psychology major, and the twin brother of Brandon Gordon, 21, was assigned to the 160th Special Operations**



Brandon Gordon, 21

**Aviation Regiment (Airborne). He was killed in action when his Chinook helicopter crashed on February 18, 2007, in Iraq.**

"He was my twin brother. I can only speak for myself, but it hasn't gotten easier, I think about it every day. I cry everyday. I wear my brother's dog tags, the ones he wore when he was in his accident. Time can heal lot of wounds, but that whole process was very painful and emotional. I can't say anyone of us has taken it harder or easier than anyone else. It's never going to go away, and I don't want it to go away.

"I don't think the loss is any different from past wars and conflicts, although the situation might be different. Losing a family member regardless of what it is,

it hurts. It's a lot more meaningful that he fought and gave his life so we would have our freedom — that has a meaning behind it. And I don't think this loss has less significance.

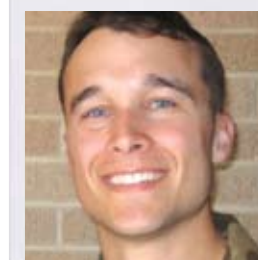
"For our family, the United States military was extremely supportive, the 160th Special Operations Aviation unit — the whole unit has been supportive. Essentially a lot of those guys have become a second family, too. My dad would agree.

"So I'd tell people, you should love your loved one every day. Pray to anyone you believe in, for him.

"And I was able to tell Brandon how much I loved him. It almost seems like I couldn't tell him enough. I supported everything he did. It was his choice.

"If I could join, I would — not for revenge, it's not a vengeance thing, but because I would do the same thing he did."

**Artis Henderson, 26, of Fort Myers Beach, a graduate of The Wharton School, is a freelance writer and publicist at ECHO, the Educational Concerns for Hunger Organization. Married on July 1, 2006, her husband, Chief War-**



Miles Henderson, 24

**rant Officer Miles Henderson, 24, was killed in the crash of his AH-64 D Apache Longbow helicopter on Nov. 6, 2006, in Iraq. He served as a member of the 82nd Airborne Division.**

"Does it get easier? Truthfully, yes. People told me, 'Time will heal this.' I looked at them and I'd say, 'Nothing will heal this.' It's still horrible, but it's easier than it was 10 months ago. The talk in

grief counseling is that this is like a physical wound. With time it does scab over, but there's always that scar, and it hurts.

"What would I say to others? Well, it's so relative. I guess I would say what people said to me — time does heal. But boy, you don't want to hear that. The most positive thing a person said came from somebody I didn't actually know that well. He came into my office one day, and said: "I just want to acknowledge this. I don't know what to say to you, because 'I'm sorry' is so clearly not enough, but I just want to acknowledge your pain."

"So I think that's the best you can do. "But was it worth it? No. Well, I have a dual response. For me, no. Nothing would justify this. I'd give everything I have to have him back.

"He would have told you, This is very much worth it. He left me an 'If It Happens' letter. He said his death would help someone else..."

"In World War II, the hearts of people across the nation were with soldiers. History, I think, has certainly shown a just cause. But the farther we get into this Iraq war, the more we can see it's not a just cause. Now, it's just such a loss.

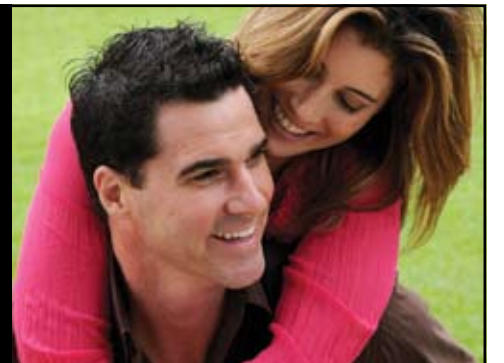
"I'm not part of any military support group. My mother is my biggest support. This happened to her, too. When I was 5 years old, my father was killed in an airplane crash, so she experienced this. She said, 'I can't believe this is happening to you, too.'

"But it did and it is.

Here's what I would say to people: it's still going on. Miles is gone, but his unit is still there. They were supposed to be there for 12 months, but it's been 15 months now, and they're still there. And they could get killed at any moment, any time.

"There are so many young men and women there who need to come home." ■

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