

Remembering Darren Braswell

“It is with deep regret and sadness that I have to tell you about a member of the AAFES family who died serving our country in Iraq. As you can imagine, this is the part of the job that every commander hopes will never come.

Darren D. Braswell, 36, of Riverdale, Ga., died Jan. 7 when the UH-60 Blackhawk helicopter in which he was a passenger crashed just before midnight about 7 miles east of Tal Afar, Iraq, a northern city near the Syrian border. The Black Hawk, which carried eight Soldiers and four civilians, was part of a two-helicopter team providing support for the 101st Airborne Division. The cause of the incident is under investigation; it is suspected to have been a result of bad weather in the area.

AAFES' most important resource: its people

Darren, one of more than 450 AAFES associates who are currently working downrange, was a logistics site liaison who facilitated the movement of products to AAFES stores. Volunteers, such as Darren, are the backbone of the Exchange Service. They ensure the more than 60 AAFES stores throughout the contingency operations area are supplying troops with basic supplies including socks, personal care items



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*—Maj. Gen. Paul Essex,
AAFES commander*

rand beverages, to comfort items such as televisions, DVD players and movies.

Darren reminds us, yet again, that an organization's most important resource is its people. He had worked for AAFES for nearly five years, and was a warehouse foreman at the Atlanta Distribution Center before volunteering to deploy to Iraq last May.

As a warehouse foreman, he was responsible for, “Making sure everything from treadmills to Army uniforms were properly received and stored.” He was an outstanding employee who quickly moved through the ranks.

Never met a stranger

Ask his friends at the Atlanta Distribution Center about Darren and they describe a man who never met a stranger. They say that Darren was a very compassionate man with an infectious smile and an easy manner, quickly adding that it has been their distinct pleasure to have

known him.

Darren was a true hero in his own right and a wonderful American who epitomized selfless service. It was his magnetic personality that made him so special to all with whom he came in contact, and he will be sadly missed.

When Darren decided to deploy in support of America's troops he did so knowing the dangers all too well. Our volunteers are special people who have given so much by leaving the safety of home to provide comfort to troops. As some of you know, Darren had already spent six months in Iraq when he decided to extend.

One associate who “lived, ate, breathed, fought and laughed” with Darren said he “was always in a great mood and cheering people up.” I believe that Darren realized his easy going spirit was a comfort to the troops with whom he served and lived during his eight months in Iraq.

Selfless service

Darren deployed looking for a chance to help people. As anyone who knew Darren would tell you, he wasn't the type to tell you what he was going to do, he just did it.

Once again, Darren accomplished his mission, a noble mission, on behalf of Soldiers, Sailors, Airmen and Marines. Darren will live on through those who benefited from his selfless service.

As one Soldier posted to the Internet, “The AAFES employees are probably the most under-appreciated members of the extended military family. Under-appreciated except by the troops downrange.

“You helped make a hard row easier, Mr. Braswell—Godspeed.”



ATLANTA, Ga.—Darren Braswell's family members gathered in 2008 on the anniversary of his death while deployed to Iraq. Just before leaving his Georgia home for the Global War on Terror, he urged his anxious mother, third from left, not to worry.