

Every day is Memorial Day for the family of [Master Sergeant Robert Mark Horrigan](#). The weeks leading up to the holiday and through June 17, though, mark an intensified period of mourning for Robert's identical twin brother and [American Bladesmith Society](#) master smith John Horrigan of [Elite Knives](#). Robert was a member of C Squadron, 1<sup>st</sup> Special Forces Operational Detachment, Delta Force, JSOC and June 17, 2005, was the date he was killed in action in Al Qa'im, Iraq. Gentlemanly, soft-spoken, John says, "Excuse my language, but I'm an asshole for about two weeks" leading up to Memorial Day. And with that, you know that no matter how courteous, no matter how elite the warrior pedigree of either man, John knows exactly how hard it is for Gold Star\* families and fellow veterans, and he's willing to get in the dirt and help.



John Horrigan owns Elite Knives and works out of his home shop in Burnet, Texas. His knifemaking began in earnest after returning from his service as a U.S. Army Ranger in 3rd Battalion, 75th Regiment.

The Horrigan twins learned to hunt and fish growing up on a farm in Limestone, Maine, which is in Aroostook County, so far north it might as well be in New Brunswick, Canada. When the boys were 10, knowing jobs would be scarce, the family moved to Florida. The humidity exacerbated their father's emphysema and tuberculosis, however, so two years later they moved to Austin, Texas. John and Robert enlisted together and advanced to become U.S. Army Rangers, serving in 3<sup>rd</sup> Battalion, 75 Ranger Regiment. After three years, John left the military—for love. He had met Donna when he was 17 and she was almost 15.

He has now been married to his high school sweetheart for 29 years. They have a daughter and a son, with one grandchild and another on the way. "I just knew the military life was not for her," John said.



Then-U.S. Army Ranger Robert Horrigan pins the Ranger Tab on his twin brother John Horrigan's shoulder at a graduation ceremony on Fort Benning, Georgia.

John performed security for the U.S. Department of the Treasury for a short while and then became a deputy with the Travis County Sheriffs Office as well as a fireman. In 1983 John made his first knife. After his brother's death, he made a commemorative knife for Bob's unit and another for President George W. Bush. He makes everything from swords, daggers and the occasional tomahawk to camp knives, hunters and bowies. John also continues to make his brother's design, the Bob Horrigan Military Fighter. You can read more about the brothers and their knives in an article by Kevin Jones that ran in the December 2010 issue of BLADE Magazine entitled, "Twin Brothers, Makers and Heroes."



The Bob Horrigan Military Fighter has a 6 1/2-inch blade made out of 440C stainless. The guard and handle bolts are made of 303 stainless. The handle is fashioned with Black Linen Micarta. Overall length: 11 1/4 inches. Maker's list price: \$550. This design is also available with a double guard at 13 inches overall at the same price, or in pattern-welded steel with ironwood handles at a maker's list price of \$720.

While love and love of knives determined the course of one brother's life, the warrior spirit could not be quenched in the other. Over the course of his 19 1/2-year career, which culminated in Special Forces, Robert, who his brothers-in-arms called Bob, deployed five times to Iraq and three times to Afghanistan. "Badass" and "real deal" can be overused, but not with Bob Horrigan. Delta operator George E. Hand IV wrote two eulogies of Bob for SOFREP News that get to the heart of the quintennial gentleman warrior: "Delta's Robert Horrigan: A Better Man Than I" and "Delta Forces' Own Robert Horrigan: Dwarfed By The Presence of Giants."



Robert M. Horrigan left the service when his twin brother, John, did but reenlisted, moving into Special Forces after his time in Ranger Regiment. He was killed in action in Iraq, June 17, 2005,





in Al Qa'im, Iraq. This portrait of MSG Robert M. Horrigan was done by Phil Taylor for the non-profit [The American Fallen Soldiers Project](#). It was present to the Horrigan family in accordance with the 501(c)(3)'s mission of bringing comfort and healing to Gold Star\* families. You can watch the video about this particular portrait at the bottom of this post.

Bob did not have to go on his last mission. He was closing in on retirement. He had plans. He was going home to his wife and daughter and he was going to make knives with his brother. Five years before, John had introduced Bob to knifemaking, and he liked it. While living in base housing on Fort Bragg Bob would run an extension cord outside to work on his creations. "I'm not sure they would have been happy about if they knew," John says, a warmth in his voice. Like John, Bob loved the artistry of knifemaking, but he only had time for making combat knives.



In addition to medals depicted here by ribbons, Robert Horrigan was posthumously promoted to Master Sergeant and awarded the Legion of Merit Medal, the Bronze Star Medal with Valor Device and the Purple Heart. In addition to his mother, Mary; twin brother, John; and sister Lisa Shine, he is survived by his wife, Denise; his daughter, Courtney; and another brother, Daniel. He is buried in Section 60, Site 9131 at Arlington National Cemetery.

John continues to live out this dichotomy. "I could make a lot more money making fighters," he said. After banging out 40 of them, though, he longs to delve into the art of the craft. Then, when he's deep into a showpiece and it seems like it will never be finished, he begins to long for the refreshing simplicity of hammering away on combat knives. "I flip flop," he says. "I used to have six or seven pieces, 80 percent done" for BLADE Show. He laughs about what he refers to as his attention deficit hyperactivity disorder. Now he works

on two at a time and finishes them before he moves on to the next one. After the show he enjoys being able to relax and resume his own pace.

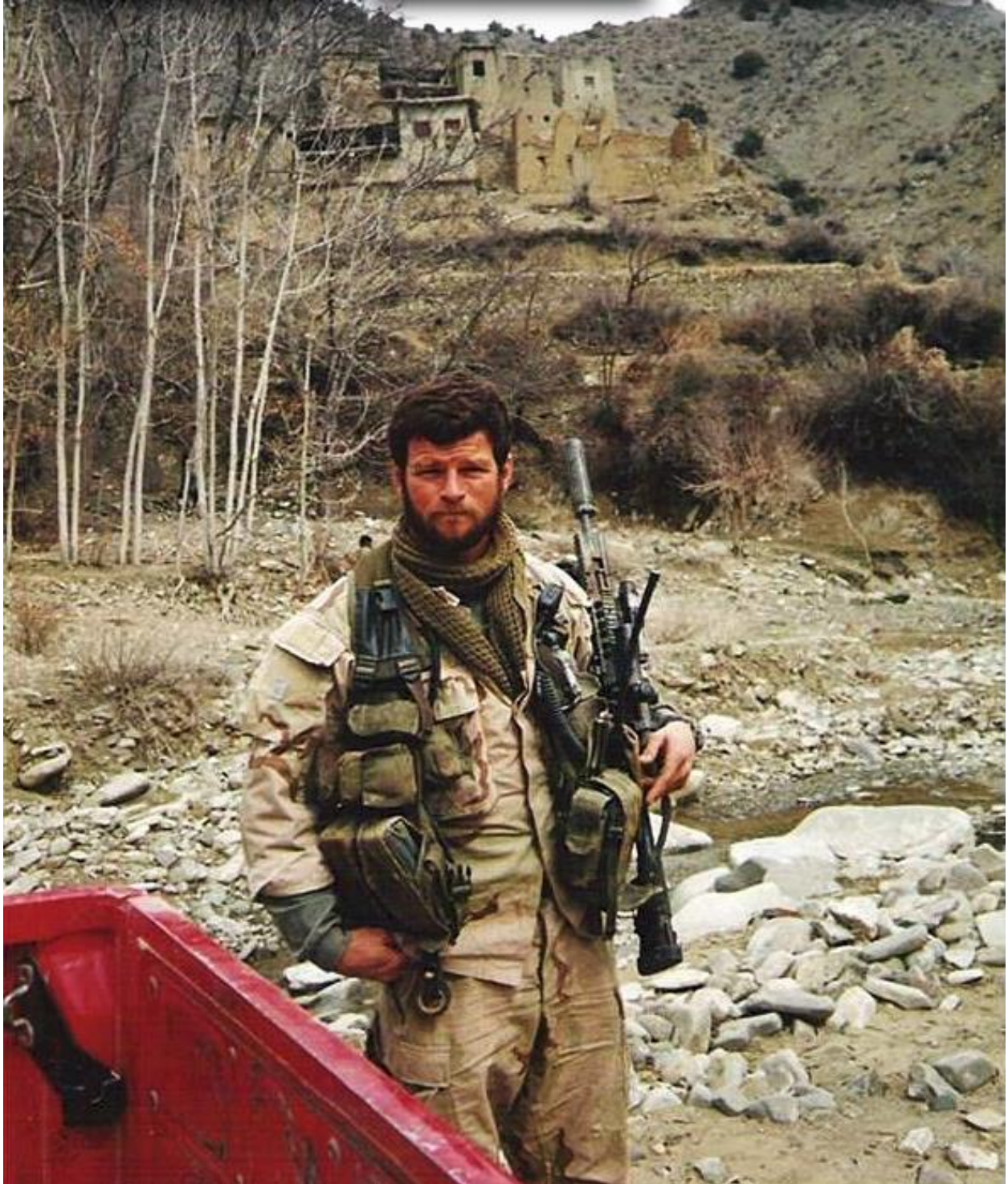


When he needs a break from combat knives, maker John Horrigan switches to crafting high-end pieces of art. This bowie is made in American flag mosaic-pattern steel. Although you can't see it, "In God We Trust" is engraved along the spine. The handle scales are 416 stainless steel engravings with the Statue of Liberty. The quote on the blade is done in 24-carat gold. Contact: Elite Knives

So although Robert didn't have to go on that last mission, he wanted to be with his unit. And with that decision, the dream the twins shared of living out their days together with their families and making knives ended—hard, on the other side of a breached door. The objective was to sneak in, target Abu al-Zarqawi, the al-Qaida leader in Iraq, and get out. The problem was that by the time the mission was underway, the enemy knew the Americans were coming. Bob Horrigan was the number-one man. He got inside the room and was immediately engaged in an intense firefight. The number-two man, Master Sergeant Michael L. McNulty—also a twin—was shot down on the threshold. While teammates extracted Mike from the doorway, Bob took hits to his femoral artery and head. Both men held on while their brethren simultaneously

continued the battle, plugged their wounds and extracted them to a secondary airfield 1000 meters away because a closer one was under attack. Both men were alive when they were put on the aircraft and when they landed at the medical facility. Heart massage was performed on Bob. But, as John explained, when you've been hit that many times, when you've lost that much blood, no matter how much they hold on, it's only a matter of time before they succumb.





John 15:13 reads this way in the New King James version of the Bible: "Greater love has no one than this, than to lay down one's life for his friends." John Horrigan will tell you that his twin brother, Robert, did just that for his brothers-in-arms. Jesus did the same for us. This photo of Robert was taken March 19, 2002, east of the Shahi-Kot Valley on the route to Khost during the post-Operation Anaconda chase.



“Maine is good to its veterans,” John Horrigan said. According to The Summit Project nearly 1 in 7 Mainers are veterans or approximately 15 percent of the state’s population, one of the highest rates of any state in the nation. The Summit Project honors fallen heroes and brings awareness to the challenges of grieving families. The Bangor Daily News covered the event in 2014. The article was entitled [“Feeling the weight: Hikers carry tribute stones for Maine heroes to Baxter mountaintop.”](#)

One night at the firehouse, John had a dream. In it, Robert came to him and told him to look up Al Qa’im. “I’m thinking, ‘I’ll never remember that,’” John said. Al Qa’im was a center for insurgency near the Syrian border, and the town in which Bob was killed. It means ‘I have risen.’” John pauses. “Another translation is ‘I have ascended.’”

It is like this all the time, Bob orchestrating serendipitous exchanges for his family and especially his twin. “I lost half of me,” John said. It took me a year and a half to get beyond wanting to blow my head off,” he admitted. “God really



had to hit me with a sledge hammer...It's not about you anymore. It's about Me."

John and Robert's mother was a novice nun. After five years in the convent, she knew she wanted to have children, so she left. The Horrigan children were given a Catholic upbringing. "In the Army, you drift away," John said. About two years before he died, Robert told John that he was coming back to God. John accepted the news in his easygoing manner but didn't think as much of it as he does now in hindsight.

"All this macho 'I can handle it.' Well, obviously, you can't. You have to talk to someone," John said. "There has to be a support network and having God can help." John is quiet for a moment. "Bob was a sniper," he reveals. Bob told John that he'd killed 50 to 60 enemy combatants. "He did not have PTSD, *that I know of*," he emphasized. Bob told John that he was OK, because he was "alright with God." The Old Testament is filled with killing, John said. "Evil exists in this world and you have to exterminate it. It's like when you have an infestation of bugs. You have to kill everyone, or they'll come back. When you're fighting an ideology where (the enemy is) hiding behind women and children, it's like a cancer of the highest magnitude" that must be eradicated.

"Memorial Day is not a happy time," John said. He acknowledges the day by telling people about his brother and the tragedy of leaving a hurting wife, 12-year-old daughter, mother, siblings and especially a twin with whom he did everything. But perhaps because of the leadership ingrained in him as a Ranger, John understands that he cannot be consumed by the grief of his own loss. God channels his pain in a way that reaches people just like him, veterans and family members who are wracked with unbearable grief. John recently lost a firefighting co-worker to suicide. It left him shocked because the man was always so cheerful "Everyone has demons. Call me. We'll fight them together."