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The Missing

Lisbeth Darsh explains why she'll be suffering through a Hero workout this Memorial Day.



Column

By Lisbeth Darsh

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Courtesy of CrossFit Heroes

"Mom, if I die, I'll die a happy man doing what I love to do."

My friend USAF Capt. James Poulet—call sign "Boo Boo"—said that to his mom in 1989, about a year before his F-15E fighter jet rooster-tailed for 300 feet across the Omani sand and then pancaked over into the ground. Boo Boo and his front-seater, Maj. Peter Hook (who piloted the aircraft) were killed instantly. They had been on an aerial engagement

1 of 2

with a British Jaguar in preparation for the Persian Gulf War. At 12:35 a.m. on Sept. 30, 1990, their lives ended 7,512 miles from home. They were just two of the 294 U.S. service members lost in Operation Desert Shield/Storm.

Boo Boo was 34 years old when he died. He had a soft voice, a great hug, and the last time I ever saw him, he purred in my ear. I miss him still.

Memorial Day rolls around each year, and we give it lip service. When I say “we,” I mean us a society, not just me and you. There are parades and speeches and flags placed on front porches, but I’m not certain many folks stop and listen. I’m not sure people halt what they’re doing and consider and appreciate the sacrifices made by people like Boo Boo.

Perhaps folks would rather not remember. Remembering is a hard thing, a painful thing. It’s not fun, so it’s easier to forget, to gloss over. Easier to shop and drink and sleep. That would be easier for me, too. But that doesn’t make it right.

In the years after the horrific military casualties of the Civil War, families would gather for “dinner on the ground” near the graves of their loved ones. They would eat and drink and celebrate those they had lost. They had dinner with them. This is believed to be the start of the picnic tradition on Memorial Day.

In our modern society, somehow it feels like we have lost the purpose in our picnic. In many ways, we have forsaken a certain amount of community with our armed forces and with those who gave all. But I’m proud we strive to maintain the connection in much of the CrossFit world. We embrace and support and celebrate our service members, even after they have passed out of this world.

So if some people find it odd CrossFit has a tradition of remembering athletes who paid the ultimate price while serving their country, I don’t really care. Let others wonder about our Hero workouts and question whether doing these workouts serves a purpose. When you think about it, however, honoring sacrifice with shopping is far more ridiculous. Better we should do a workout and speak the names of those who perished in the service of their country: That would be an honor.

I remember walking out of Boo Boo’s memorial service on a warm North Carolina afternoon in October 1990. As we hit the oak chapel doors and spilled out onto the still-green and luscious lawn, we could hear the rumble



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For many, Memorial Day is a chance to pay tribute with a challenging workout.

of the jets approaching. Four dark grey F-15Es screamed over our heads, and then one shot straight up into the sky in the missing man formation—a move both beautiful and breathtaking and heartbreaking all at once. The other three jets flew onward, straight and steady, the hole in their formation big and empty and somehow echoing to us and the whole world.

The missing man signified my friend Boo Boo, and it really hit home that he was never coming back.

This Memorial Day, when you wake up and lace up and get ready to head to your local box, remember Boo Boo and all the troops like him. We have lost so many wonderful service members in Iraq and Afghanistan and all the conflicts of the past. Honor these heroes, thank them, and let their memories live on.

About the Author

Lisbeth Darsh is a writer and editor for CrossFit. She also blogs regularly at Wordswithlisbeth.com. She served six years as an aircraft-maintenance officer in the United States Air Force.