

Escaped!

Sgt. Scott Allen Wagner, USMC, (1986-1991) was part of an elite recon group in the city of Khafji in Saudi Arabia near the Kuwaiti border early in what is now known as the "1st Gulf War." Regarded as one of the most significant battles of the conflict, Sgt. Wagner was the radio man for the squad who had been surrounded by Iraqi forces. Calling in airstrikes on positions around the perimeter of the town where his recon group was located, the enemy was certain of their presence somewhere within the city boundaries. Moving around regularly to avoid enemy detection, the recon group avoided capture. After three days they managed to slip out, finding a Humvee that had been abandoned having lost its tires earlier. Because of Wagner's bravery under fire, his name along with the others in his recon group are today engraved on a monument honoring the retaking of the town of Khafji a few days after their escape from imminent capture and/or death.

After Scott Wagner retired from the USMC, he began his career in Law Enforcement serving along death row in the Pennsylvania State prison system. A few years later, Scott, now married to his wife Diane, relocated to the Washington D.C. area where he served with the United States Parks Police Department for eight years, the last segment as a motorcycle officer policing our National Monuments. A very private person, Scott's professionalism was appreciated by everyone who worked around him. "Efficient, effective, decisive," were often words used to describe Officer Wagner who never spoke a negative word about those around him. He



Scott Allen Wagner
January 8, 1968 - May 15, 2016

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never promoted himself and rarely spoke of his past experiences.

Desiring to relocate for the benefit of his wife's training and career plans, Scott carefully researched the best location to move his young family, eventually choosing Northeastern Colorado. Working as a equestrian veterinarian, ranch property near Hudson, Colorado would serve Diane well. It was not difficult for Scott to secure a job with the Ft. Lupton Police Department with his extensive resume. After only two years however, Scott made a lateral transfer to the Westminster Police Department located on the North side of the Denver Metropolitan area in 2011. To his liking, daily contact with the public at this larger department kept him much busier than the rural farming community nearer his home.

After only a year at the WPD, Scott and his family which now included a son, Gabriel, were faced with their most significant challenge: cancer. The prognosis for Scott was bleak. Chemotherapy would help, but the aggressive cancer appeared to be terminal. With the heart of a warrior, only in his mid 40's, Scott personally battled the disease, refusing to be beaten. He wanted no sympathy from even those closest to him. He remained a very private person, confident in his own personal strength and the encouragement of his wife and son to continue working actively as a police officer. At his own request, only the administration knew of Scott's cancer. To everyone else at the PD, Scott was the model of efficiency and proper deportment, working and serving as a police officer beyond the life expectancy earlier predicted by his physicians.

At some point mid-2015, it became more obvious that Scott was beginning to lose his weight and body mass - that of a sculpted body-builder. His health was definitely in decline. It was only then that Scott's condition - stage IV cancer - was becoming known throughout the department and to me as Police Chaplain. Having lost my own wife to cancer nearly four years ago, I took the opportunity to speak with Officer Wagner while he continued to work daily, but now only in "light duty" at the front desk. Officer Wagner was cordial and acknowledged that he was aware of my experience with my wife's cancer and thanked me for my expressing my concern for him as I explained I would be praying for him. It was plain to me that he was not searching for answers, nor looking out side of himself for direction or guidance concerning what would lie ahead of him. A couple months had passed when I learned that Scott was now fading rapidly having been admitted to a hospice care facility across town. The Christian officer who informed me of these latest developments, explained he was going to visit him on his next day off - about three days away.

"I want to go with you! Call me the night before and let's confirm our plans."

It was Friday morning about 9:30 when Officer Mark Watters and myself arrived at Scott's room, finding him alone, apparently sleeping. I had shared with my prayer group just two days before to please pray that Scott would be alert and responsive when we met with him. Mark, who had gotten to know Scott as a traffic instructor a few years before, called out to him while brushing his hand along Scott's upper arm. His head was turned away

from the side of the bed where we were now standing. There was no response. Mark turned to look back at me unsure of exactly how to proceed. Was Scott heavily drugged? Was he, in fact, now comatose - totally unresponsive? I knew these were distinct possibilities from my experiences accumulated over forty-five years of ministry. Just then I saw Scott's head begin to turn as he slowly opened his eyes about half way. Making my way to the opposite side of the bed from where we had entered the room, Mark explained who we were.

"The Chaplain and I are here to see you - check on how you are doing. We'd like to visit with you for a few minutes."

I had noticed the toes on one of his feet wiggle slightly when I made my way around the bed. Scott's hands were folded across his chest, occasionally readjusting them. Unable to speak, he seemed to acknowledge that he knew who we were. After I greeted him, Mark looked my way as if to say, "OK Chaplain, he's all yours!"

I began.

"Scott, we just wanted you to know that we are praying for you and care about you. I'd like to read some Scriptures to you. I hope that will be all right."

With drowsy glances of approval from Scott, I continued for the next 10-15 minutes carefully making my way through numerous passages covering the fundamental points of the doctrine of salvation and eternal life: the human condition / God's solution through Christ's finished work on the cross as the sacrificial Lamb of God / repentance and faith / trusting in God alone for our eternal destiny. While I read several verses from the

book of Romans, the gospel of John, Ephesians and Revelation, Mark was busily watching Scott's face while praying intently for him. Once I felt like I had thoroughly explained the plan of salvation from the Bible, I addressed Scott once again,

"Scott I'm going to pray in just a moment. If you have understood the Word of God as I have read these passages to you, you can pray right now along with me in your heart."

For the next 5-10 minutes I reviewed the points I had explained earlier as I prayed with and for Scott. Mark and I had done all we could do from our perspective. We were burdened, hoping Scott had been sufficiently alert and cognizant of the message from the Bible. As I concluded our time, I told Scott that I was going to have Mark pray. It was then I reached down to take Scott's hand. I was almost startled to feel Scott firmly grasp my hand! At the same time, he had taken ahold of Mark's hand on the other side of the bed. With this new physical response from Scott, I was encouraged to pursue my interaction with him a bit further.

"Before Mark prays, I'd like to ask you a couple questions. Scott, were you able to understand the scriptures and what we have been talking about?"

Immediately, Scott squeezed and released his grip 2-3 times, clearly communicating with us!

"Tell me Scott. Did you pray along with me and ask the Lord to forgive your sin and be your Savior?"

Once again, Scott immediately responded again with 2-3 quick signals from his hand! WOW! This was incredible! Joy filled our hearts as the three of us held

hands and Mark prayed, thanking the Lord for the time we had together. Soon after, I explained we would be leaving, and so he could rest.

As I walked around the end of the bed, Mark had moved ahead of me toward the door.

“We are rejoicing with you, Scott. Praise the Lord. We will try to check on you later.”

Just then Scott raised his left arm into the air - by far the most physical motion I had seen from him during our entire visit. My first reaction was that Scott was again acknowledging that he was aware of our presence and was waving goodbye. A couple paces ahead of me, Mark was looking the other way about to reach the door and had missed seeing Scott raising his arm.

“Mark, look!”

Mark turned to see Scott just after he had lowered his arm to his side once again. But then suddenly, he raised BOTH arms skyward. An overwhelming joy filled our hearts as we realized that Scott had not been simply waving goodbye, but had assumed a common position of worship often found in the scriptures - that of raising his hands in praise to the Lord!

I felt like incredibly fortunate right then, on this Friday the 13th, having the privilege of seeing the power of the Word of God used by the Holy Spirit to rescue Scott Wagner from the bondage of sin and the penalty of death. Reviewing all we had observed that morning, Mark and I had no doubts about Scott's spiritual standing with the Lord. Upon arriving back in Westminster, I encouraged Mark to telephone Zeb, Scott's closest friend at the department. They had worked the same shift in

patrol, both hired by Westminster about the same time. As a Christian himself, Zeb had convinced Scott to receive a Bible from him when it became clear the cancer was taking over his body.

“Tell Zeb what happened this morning!”

In less than an hour I received a call from Zeb while I sat at my desk in my office at church. Mark had relayed our experience with Scott to Zeb, but I proceeded to tell him all over again as I was still excited and rejoicing. Zeb was quietly emotional on the other end of the line. Once I had finished praising the Lord with Zeb, I decided to head over to the PD to let Commander Dowling, my supervisor, know of Scott's decision. As I filled the doorway of the Commander's office, I noticed that his eyes were red as he hung up his phone. I was about to ask what might be going on (as emotional events are not uncommon among police officers as they deal with the public and strive to maintain their personal family lives), when he said,

“I just got off the phone with Mark. He told me what happened with Scott at the hospice center.”

Text messages and emails spread quickly around the department among the believers. The response was repeated time after time - tears and smiles!

Two days later, Officer Scott Wagner - Sgt. USMC retired - went to be with the Lord at 2100 hours, Sunday, May 15 - National Law Enforcement Day.

But that's not the end of the story!

At a planning meeting for Scott's funeral on Tuesday at the PD, I learned the details of another chapter in the amazing story of the previous weekend. It was Sunday afternoon, Commander Kim Barron from the department had gone to pray with Scott at the hospice facility. She told me about what she had experienced that day.

"I had arrived at Scott's room. No one was around. I saw a mat at on the floor next to his bed, so I knelt there placing both my hands on Scott's right forearm. Praying aloud for several minutes, there was no physical response from him. After a short time, I moved up to sitting in a chair beside the bed and continued to pray silently for Scott. Only the low sound coming from a television broke the otherwise quiet stillness in the room. Then I heard what I can only describe as incredible, beautiful singing. Very soft peaceful voices - only a few in number - singing 'Hallelujah!' I heard it again - only this time a bit louder. Trying to discern where it was coming from, I quickly looked at the TV to see it was tuned to ESPN. It was CERTAINLY NOT coming from there! Was it being piped over the intercom system? No, not from there! The door was cracked open a few inches. Perhaps some people had come to the facility to sing for the residents on this Sunday afternoon. There it was a third time,... and then a fourth, each time a little louder than the time before, 'Hallelujah!'

As suddenly as it had started, it had stopped, leaving behind the most serene of moments permeating the air in the room. Checking the hallway, there was absolutely NO one around anywhere from which the quiet, restful singing could have come! I shouldn't tell anyone about this, they will never believe me!"

Commander Barron's demeanor and tone was as always that of an experienced, discerning, logical law enforcement professional. There was only one reasonable conclusion based on the evidence.

"I know what I heard! The only explanation I have is that it must have been,..... angelic!"

Only a few short hours later, after a short time with his wife and son, Scott Wagner entered in to the presence of the Lord.

"...there is joy in the presence of the angels over one sinner that repents." (Luke 15:10)

On Tuesday, May 24, Scott Allen Wagner was laid to rest with full police and military honors. Scott had once again escaped what had appeared to be his final end. Victory over sin and eternal death had been won!

As part of the message I prepared for the memorial service, I concluded with this statement I had received from Diane, Scott's wife. Diane writes,

"Toward the end of his life, he questioned how this (cancer) could count as a win. He questioned why he wouldn't die "a hero." In the end, relinquishing control of his physical body to go and be with the Lord was the most heroic act a person could commit, and eternal life is the ultimate win."

*Chaplain Larry Robbins
Westminster Police Department
May 2016*

In Memory



*The Lord is my rock,
my fortress and my deliverer;
my God is my rock, in whom I take refuge,
my shield and the horn of my salvation, my stronghold.*

Psalms 18:2