

In Honor of Veteran's Day and Lt. Joseph Fortin

BRISTOL, RI __ Approximately 300 people gathered in front of the admissions building at Roger Williams University on November 11, 2009 at 11a.m. The University hosted a commemorative ceremony for 2nd Lt. Joseph Fortin, an alumnus of Cramer's Saber Battalion ROTC program and a 2008 Roger Williams graduate, who died in action on August 23, 2009 while serving with the 1st Battalion, 7th Cavalry, 1st Cavalry Division in Muhallah, Iraq.

Both the American flag and the Roger Williams University flag were waving at half-staff, blowing wildly in the cold wind, as the service started on Veteran's Day. A couple rows of chairs were spread out in front of the grass, while everybody else stood in a half circle behind them. Many students, alumni and staff were in their militia uniforms paying their respects to the veterans and current men and women across seas today.

Kenneth T. Osborne, Dean of the Roger Williams University ROTC program, opened the ceremony by welcoming Fortin's family, the entire Roger Williams community and University President Dr. Roy J. Nirschel.

"This is not a day to debate foreign policy, but to recognize veterans," said President Nirschel, "We would not be here today without their courage and their leadership. I believe that every day should be Veteran's Day."

President Nirschel spoke of his own parents and grandparents, who have served their country, and thanked those who also served in the armed forces, extending his deepest sympathy to individuals who have lost their friends and family in the service.

2nd Lt. Nicholas Pelletier, a 2009 RWU and ROTC alumni, and 1st Lt. Sam Albahari, a 2008 RWU and ROTC alumni, both spoke on behalf of their friend.

"There are no words to describe the pain that runs through us," said Lt. Albahari, "Joe is within our hearts and minds everyday."

Lt. Albahari proceeded to tell the crowd what a hero his friend Lt. Joseph Fortin truly is. Lt. Albahari spoke of how Fortin went into battle without fear or indecision as well as Fortin's many accomplishments in Iraq, which includes doubling the amount of drinking water and electricity, saving the lives of four American soldiers, and supplying safety and security to the region he was stationed in.

The last to speak was Joe's wife, Nicquelle Fortin, who thanked everyone for the truly amazing support she and Joe's family has received, and expressed with incredible grace her husband's story and the wonderful life he lived. Nicquelle spoke of how much Joe had accomplished in such a short time, how he is loved by so many, and has loved so many back with his whole heart.

"Joe would do anything for you if you so mentioned your need," said Nicquelle Fortin, "Jo always made the best lemonade out of lemons, and he would want us to do the same."

The American flag was raised all the way up to the top of the flagpole along with the Roger Williams flag, which was then taken down and folded by seven Roger Williams faculty who all previously served our country. President Nirschel then handed the Roger Williams flag, which has never been given away before in our University's history, to Fortin's mother and father in memory of their son. Two ROTC members and Joe's academic adviser for his time at Roger Williams, presented the Fortin family with a wreath in Joseph's honor, which they laid down under the flag pole, the American flag

waving high above it. A 21-gun salute, consisting of three shots was heard, followed by the Roger Williams a cappella group, who sang a rendition of the National Anthem, as the soldiers saluted the flag. Dean Osborne announced the conclusion of the ceremony, and many people started passing out yellow ribbons, in memory of Lt. Fortin and all the veteran's who have bravely allowed our country to earn the land of the free, and remain so.

By 12:05 p.m. only about 15 people were still gathered in the same spot in front of the admissions building, the plastic chairs already taken down. But the words of Joseph Fortin's friends and family still remain fresh in our minds.

"We are privileged to have our own personal angel," Nicquelle Fortin said of her husband during the ceremony, "Don't we owe it to Joe just to have a little faith?"