

trying to beat their opponents, they are not necessarily their enemies; that winning with grace and dignity often requires as much character as losing with grace and dignity; and that teams succeed over the long haul when there are people working together, helping each other and supporting each other.

These are the great lessons of George "Godfather" Thompson.

I played defensive end for Florida A&M University, and this is where I met Godfather. He gave me a great, great insight on life, even though he was just an equipment manager. He was one of great dignity and pride and told many Rattler football players about the programs and stories. Even though it was not his responsibility to be the counselor, he took that responsibility as being someone to head young men in the right direction, or point young men in the right direction.

For everyone who calls George Thompson "Godfather," and we still do, it is not a godfather that we may see on a movie or what have you, but it is out of respect and love for someone who took the time with everyone and opened his heart to accommodate not only their feelings but to guide them in the right direction.

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He came to Florida A&M from Melbourne, Florida in 1951 as a student and pursued his degree and worked on campus as an equipment manager. It changed his life and the lives of thousands of student athletes who passed under his mentorship. He is a walking, talking history book who still inspires the coaches, students and players at Florida A&M. His compliment to the university and the students is unprecedented at Florida A&M, and maybe unprecedented in the entire Nation.

Mr. Speaker, I think it is very important for us to be able to highlight the fact that he served under five coaches there at Florida A&M, and for many of those years great individuals passed through that program. Rattler football is something we take very seriously down in Florida, especially in Tallahassee, Florida where the blood runs orange and green.

I want to thank him for his commitment and his level of responsibility for so many individuals in our lifetime. So many young men have moved on to do great things in this country because of his guidance, and we honor his presence and we thank God that so many of us had the opportunity to have him walk our way. So I not only commend him, Mr. Speaker, but I also want this Congress to be aware that a great American and patriot took time to not only guide individuals like myself and others and that we are forever indebted to his presence and to his feelings and to the work that he put forth over the years doing common things uncommonly well.

IN HONOR AND MEMORY OF PRIVATE FIRST CLASS HOWARD JOHNSON, II, OF MOBILE, ALABAMA

The SPEAKER pro tempore (Mr. BISHOP of Utah). Under a previous order of the House, the gentleman from Alabama (Mr. BONNER) is recognized for 5 minutes.

Mr. BONNER. Mr. Speaker, this Saturday, Mobile, and indeed all of Alabama will say goodbye to our first casualty in the war on Iraq. While many Americans will be busy running weekend errands, shopping at the local mall, or spending time with their children at a T-ball game, I will, instead, be attending what will be a much more somber occasion, the funeral services for Private First Class Howard Johnson, II. Private Johnson was killed in combat while bravely serving and protecting this great Nation in Operation Iraqi Freedom.

Mr. Speaker, recently I visited with Howard's parents, the Reverend and Mrs. Howard Johnson, at their home in Mobile. Like every other parent would do in similar circumstances, the Johnsons grieve over the loss of their wonderful son. They told me what a fine young man Howard was, how he was always thinking of other people, and how he had a special concern especially for the older people who were in his father's church.

They said Howard loved life, and he was blessed with many wonderful friends. In the living room of their home, I had a chance to view several photographs of Howard, first as a little boy, then as a teenager, and more recently as a young man. Always, always, there was a big smile on his face. Howard Johnson, II, had a contagious smile and an optimistic spirit that looked to the future with hope and anticipation.

In uniform and in service to our country, Private Johnson exhibited courage, selfless service, and honor as a member of the United States Army and its 507th Ordnance Maintenance Company. Tragically, Private Johnson's supply convoy was ambushed in the early days of the campaign in the Iraqi city of Nasiriyah.

Although stationed at Fort Bliss in El Paso, Texas, Private Johnson resided in Mobile, Alabama with his family. He was a 2001 graduate of LeFlore High School and a member of the ROTC. Upon graduation from high school, Howard joined the Army and served as an automated logistical specialist after graduating from basic training at Fort Jackson, South Carolina in August of 2001.

On Wednesday of this week, more than 1,500 friends, former classmates, teachers and members of Howard's extended family attended a memorial service at the LeFlore High School gymnasium. Howard Johnson, II, will be remembered for many fine qualities, not the least of which is the fact that today he is also known as and wears the title "hero."

As you might imagine, I was deeply saddened to receive the word of Private Johnson's death. While it is always hard to understand why we must lose any of our young people, especially those serving and protecting our Nation in our Armed Forces, I believe it is accurate to say Private Johnson's family takes great comfort from the fact that Howard was ably performing his duty in an honorable manner that reflects the rich tradition of our military.

Even during this sad time, his parents, family and friends are rightly proud of his many accomplishments and that he voluntarily committed himself to preserving the freedoms that we sometimes take for granted and that we enjoy here in the United States and to spreading those freedoms to the victims of an oppressive regime halfway around the world.

Mr. Speaker, Howard's family is fortunate that they can rely on a rock-solid faith and a loving God to provide personal strength and comfort during these difficult days. Reverend Johnson, Howard's father, is pastor of the Truevine Missionary Baptist Church in Mobile where Howard played drums and was active in Sunday school in the children's ministry. Right before Howard was prepared to ship off to Kuwait, he reassured his father that "I'm ready, and I know what I'm facing, and I just believe that God is going to do it for me."

Mr. Speaker, Howard Johnson's willingness to pay what has become the ultimate sacrifice has contributed immeasurably to the freedom and security of this Nation, to Iraq, and the world.

The 507th's "One team, one fight" motto also embodies this worldwide mission that our servicemen and women have undertaken. May the prayers of a grateful Nation bring some comfort to the Johnson family and to all other families who have lost loved ones during this war, and may God continue to bless America, the greatest country on the face of the Earth.

ESTABLISHING A PERMANENT PRESENCE IN THE MIDDLE EAST

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Under a previous order of the House, the gentleman from Michigan (Mr. CONYERS) is recognized for 5 minutes.

Mr. CONYERS. Mr. Speaker, I want to bring to your attention a fascinating article in this month's issue of Mother Jones magazine, written by Robert Dreyfuss, and it deals with the question of establishing a permanent presence in the Middle East. I wanted to point out that this issue of oil, which fuels military power, national treasuries and international politics, is no longer a commodity to be bought and sold within the confines of traditional energy supply and demand balances. Rather, it has been transformed into a determinant of well-being of national security and of international