

IN THE SHADOW



LCPL THOMAS E. RIVERS, JR.



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HORRIBLE VISIT

At 7:11 a.m. CST on April 28, 2010, a car door slammed as Tom Rivers walked to the kitchen for his morning cup of coffee. He glanced out the window to see who was outside. His heart stopped when he saw three Marines walking toward his house. He called for his wife, Charon, to get dressed and ran to the door. "Don't tell me you're here to tell me my son is dead," he said, his voice cracking with emotion.

SCHOOL AND TRAINING

"I've wanted to be a Marine since I was ten-years-old," Thomas Rivers wrote in a high school essay. "I believe joining the Marines would be a good experience for me because it will teach me to rely on God to make it through." Both grandfathers served in the military and after 9/11, Thomas

wanted to represent his family in protecting America. He wrote in his journal that he knew God called him to be a warrior. There was never any doubt.

Due to a lack of motivation, Thomas struggled in high school until a recruiter told him he needed a diploma to enlist. After that conversation, low grades and motivation were not a problem. He graduated in 2007 and fulfilled his dream by joining the Marines two weeks later.

Rivers stuck to his strong values in the unforgiving humidity of South Carolina's Parris Island. "He joined the Marines as a kid," his father said, "but graduated a strong warrior. I almost didn't recognize him when I saw him at his graduation." Thomas was ready to defend his country.

DEPLOYED

America took the war to the terrorists overseas and Thomas was deployed to Iraq in July 2008. The raw desert heat of war-torn Iraq further sharpened him into a true leader. He returned home to the relief of his parents in March 2009.

After a year of further training, word

came that the 1st Battalion, 2nd Marine Regiment, 2nd Marine Division of the II Marine Expeditionary Force was needed in Afghanistan. Lance Corporal Rivers was a team leader. The young Marine, now almost 22, with one combat tour under his belt, prepared for another deployment with the same focus, faith and strength that guided him through Iraq. In the final hours before he left, he held hands with his sister, mom and dad and prayed. In the pit of her stomach, his mother feared it would be the last time she would ever pray with her son.

AFGHANISTAN

Hours of boredom laced with moments of terror sum up the life of a modern Marine and it was no different for Lance Cpl. Rivers. However, his friendship with Lance Corporal Matthew Proctor made the down time bearable.

The two struck up a friendship while training together in North Carolina at Camp Lejuene. LCpl. Matthew Proctor had stood in front of the whole Alpha Company and invited them to join his Bible study. Out of the 150 men in their unit, Thomas was the



only one who showed up.

They continued their two-man Bible study in Afghanistan, but soon Matthew grew discouraged. The normally upbeat Proctor approached Thomas. "I quit. This Bible study is a joke. Nobody's coming, so why should we keep it up?"

Thomas stared at him for a few moments, then said, "Suck it up, man. You can't quit now."

The two continued in their small study until one day, Thomas asked, "Hey Proctor, do you think I'm a Christian?"

Matthew thought a minute and then said, "I know you prayed to ask Jesus to be your Savior, but the Bible also says you will know who are really Christians by their actions. 'A good tree bears good fruit and a bad tree bears bad fruit.' You, my friend, are a good fruit bearer."

OUIJA BOARD

Although the Bible study wasn't a big hit with the other Marines, another spiritual influence was. One of the Marines in their division was heavily involved in Satanism. He even had the name of his personal demon



tattooed on his bicep. Several Marines were fascinated with his Ouija board. Every night, ten to fifteen of them spent several hours hunched over the board asking questions. It seemed to know all the answers and the men sensed its supernatural power.

Proctor grabbed Thomas one night and said, "Hey, these guys personalities are changing for the worse. I think we ought to have our Bible study and pray while they are conjuring demons."

At the same time the Marines questioned the spirits, Rivers and Proctor opened their Bibles and began to pray in the next room. "Lord, You said where two or more are gathered in Your name, You are with them," Proctor prayed before they began to read Scripture together.

Within fifteen minutes, a cry of frustration arose from the crowd in the other room. "Hey, it's not working. What happened?"

Thomas grinned at Matthew. "Looks like the Lord showed up and the demon fled."

Two nights later, the Marines got out the board. Proctor and Rivers exchanged glances as they went for their Bibles. This time the Ouija Board did not respond at all



and most of the Marines lost interest and quit using it altogether.

MORTARS

The Taliban set up a mortar position atop a nearby mountain where they could rain down destruction. Leadership fell to Rivers to set up a security position to stop the enemy. Proctor, next in command, would follow with a second group of Marines.

The night before their mission, the two men shared their “life” verses. Thomas pulled his shirt up to reveal a tattoo—Psalm 91:1. “This is it for me,” he said. “I love Psalm 91 and my mom prays it for me every day. **‘He who lives in the shelter of the Most High will rest in the shadow of the Almighty.’**” (Psalm 91:1)

MISSION

As the sun began to peek over the horizon coloring the sky a vivid red, the Marines prepared to march. It was a half-hour hike to the shell of a building where they planned to set up. Proctor,



weighed down with the gear he needed for the mission, had a sudden impression he should bring his Bible. *That's crazy*, he told himself. *Its just extra weight and there's no chance I'd ever have a moment to read it.* But he grabbed it anyway.

As patrol leader, Rivers arrived first and ordered his men to take their positions. However, the Marine assigned to stand watch was exhausted. A patrol leader is never required to stand a post, but Thomas and Proctor had been reading in the Bible about love. "Love isn't an emotion," Proctor said. "It is laying down your life for your friends. **'Greater love has no one than this, that he should lay down his life for his friends.'**" (John 15:13)

"You rest," Thomas told him. "I'll stand post for you."

At 6:33 a.m., Thomas Rivers walked to the designated area to stand security.

From a short distance away, Proctor saw a cloud of dust billow up about 10 feet high. *What is that?*, he wondered. While replacing the exhausted Marine, Rivers had activated an improvised explosive device (IED). A moment later the concussion boomed. Proctor ran forward fearing the

enemy was shelling them from the mountaintop.

As soon as he secured the perimeter, Proctor entered the compound and saw two men down. He gasped as if punched in the gut when he saw one of them was Rivers.

Immediately, his training took over. He took command and ordered the injured to be cared for as he called communications and set up security.

With his duty discharged, he rushed to Thomas and cradled his head in his lap. He bent down to watch his facial expressions and knew his best friend was in shock.

"Hey Thomas," he said. "Do you want me to read your life verse?"

Suddenly Rivers eyes gained focus. He looked straight at Proctor and said, "Yeah, yeah!" he said with clarity. "Do that."

Proctor dug out his Bible and read, **"He who dwells in the shelter of the Most High will rest in the shadow of the Almighty."** (Psalm 91:1)

"Now here's my life verse," Proctor said, and with his voice cracking with emotion he read,

**"For me, to live is Christ,
but to die is gain."** (Philippians 1:21)



The last passage he read pertained to the question Thomas had asked him several weeks before.

“A good tree produces good fruit, and a bad tree produces bad fruit. Yes, just as you can identify a tree by its fruit, so you can identify people by their actions.” (Matthew 7:17, 20)

When Thomas slipped into unconsciousness, the Marines worked to keep him breathing. Proctor laid his hands on him and several others placed theirs on his back as he prayed. In the midst of the noise and chaos, a sudden hush fell as Proctor said, “Lord, we lift Thomas up to you. We want you to heal him, but may Your will be done.”

Lance Corporal Thomas Rivers entered Heaven at 7:11 a.m. Afghanistan time, April 28, 2010.

NEW MISSION

Back at base that night, Proctor was angry. “Why God? Why did you take my one friend? The only man here besides me who loves you?” He poured over his Bible and the next day he announced, “Hey guys,





I'm going to do a Bible study if anyone wants to come."

Nine Marines showed up.

"Greater love has no one than this, that he should lay down his life for his friends." (John 15:13) "Just like Thomas died in your place," Proctor said, nodding to the Marine who was supposed to stand watch, "Jesus died for us. Thomas wasn't perfect though. He couldn't take on all the bad things you've done because he had his own problems.

"But Jesus never did anything wrong. That's why He can die in our place and take onto Himself all the lies, fears and crud that separates us from God. If you ask Jesus Christ to be your Savior and Lord, He forgives your sins and gives you eternal life. He enables us to have a personal relationship with God.

"Being a Christian isn't a religion, its knowing God and walking in His truths. If you want to know Him and also know when you die you'll spend eternity with Him in heaven, you can pray a simple prayer. God knows you, and isn't concerned as much with your words as he is with the attitude of your heart.





“Pray with me, ‘Lord Jesus thank you for dying on the cross to pay the penalty for my sins. You promised to come into my life, forgive my sins and give me eternal life. I know you don’t lie, so I thank you for coming into my life as you promised. From this day forward I’m going to believe Your Word that you live in me. Amen.’”

At the end of the study, three Marines told Proctor they prayed with him. One of them was the Satanist leader. For the rest of their time in Afghanistan, the two became close friends as Proctor taught him to walk with God and study His Word.

“I’ve done a lot of terrible things,” he told Proctor. “How can God forgive me for it all?”

“The Bible says that we aren’t saved by the good things we do. Jesus paid for it all, past, present and future. Now we obey Him, not out of fear and duty, but because we love Him.”

LCpl Thomas E. Rivers, Jr. gave his heart to Jesus and his life for his country.





Just like the three Marines, you do not have to be perfect to have a relationship with Jesus Christ. We hope that you will pray the same prayer the three Marines prayed and invite Jesus into your life to forgive all of your sins and give you eternal life.

If you prayed the prayer, please contact us so we can send you some valuable material to help you grow in your relationship with God.

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For further information please visit our website:
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Serving those who are serving, who have served, in honor of those who gave the ultimate sacrifice.





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