

Gillespie honored in capacity crowd service

Written by By Betsy Blevins, Managing Editor

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Jan. 20, 2010 - Over 680 family and friends created a sea of maroon in the Leonard High School gymnasium Saturday afternoon, each coming to celebrate the life of the Texas A & M Corps of Cadets Company P2 Commanding Officer Taylor Gillespie. Gillespie, a 2007 graduate of Leonard, died tragically in a car accident on Jan. 9, while on his way back to Texas A & M to prepare for his final semester.



Several of those who had the pleasure of having a close relationship with Gillespie participated in the funeral service, sharing glimpses of his short life, and giving testimony to the leader and man of faith that he was. Former Sunday School teacher Jeremy Farber told how Gillespie had given him all of the money he had at 11 years old after Farber and his wife lost everything in a house fire.

“I was expecting ten, maybe twenty dollars inside that envelope,” Farber said. “I was shocked and humbled to find \$200. It was everything he earned and saved up to that point in his life.”

Life-long friend Joshua Burgess shared how Gillespie was his accountability partner in the Christian faith, and always reminded Burgess to read his Bible and pray, and vice versa.

“The last text I got from him was, ‘You’ve been prayed for, brother,’” Burgess said.

Cornerstone Baptist Church Youth Pastor Shawn Wilkerson mentioned a “Top Ten List” that Gillespie had written in his Bible, which was a list of friend’s names that he was praying for to become Christians. In a round-about way, Gillespie’s prayers were answered and he was honored in the best way possible when at least seven people attending his funeral made that

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decision after a message by Cornerstone pastor Chris Cowen.

Master Gunnery Sergeant Fred Hauffe and Brigadier General Joe E. Ramirez honored Gillespie's life and his dedication and leadership in the Corps of Cadets by presenting a Meritorious Service Medal to his parents. A letter accompanying the medal stated, "Through his complete devotion to duty and professionalism, Taylor made extraordinary contributions to his unit and to the welfare of the cadets under his command. As a true leader of character Taylor was respected and admired by his peers, subordinates and superiors alike. He is known for his hard work, positive attitude, strong faith and genuine concern for his fellow Aggies. Taylor made a positive and lasting impact on the lives of the countless cadets who are now better prepared to uphold the highest traditions of the Corps and Texas A&M University."

In a heart-wrenching moment that left many of his P-2 Company - and the general crowd - in tears, Gillespie's father, T.J., presented his Commanding Officer saber to his Executive Officer, Jake Stefano. Stefano stood weeping as the father - assisted by another cadet due to injuries sustained in the car accident with his son - stood and passed the sword to him, with a few words of encouragement (see related photo on Page 1). Stefano stayed in 'attention' until taking his seat again, where he could be seen wiping tears away in mourning for his former Commanding Officer, whom he had just taken the place of.

The service and burial were conducted in semi-military style with a flare of Aggie and Corps tradition. The procession was led by Corps Piper Michael Cobb who played "Amazing Grace", and the service concluded with "Taps", played by Corps Bugler Michael Todd Dock, Jr, and the Senior Cadets created a "Boot Line" as Gillespie's casket exited. Once at the grave sight at Grove Hill Cemetery, the A & M flag that adorned Gillespie's casket was removed, folded and presented to his parents, and members of the P-2 Company joined arms and surrounded Gillespie's headgear as it was held high on the CO's saber, and remembered him with one final outfit yell. "Taps" was played one last time.

Gillespie will be remembered on Feb. 1 on the Texas A & M campus during the monthly Silver Taps time of remembrance. While not confirmed at press time, he will likely be honored again during the annual Aggie Muster, scheduled for April 21.