

**Eulogy for Don Black Munson, Lt. Colonel, USA
Chaplain, MOWW Dallas Chapter
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As we gather here today to surround the family members of Don Munson with our love and prayers, we honor and celebrate the life of a soldier, leader, patriot, mentor, and a friend to many. A man of purpose, Don was a man of good cheer and contagious strength, a man of unwavering faith in the Shepherd of the 23rd Psalm, a scripture the family picked for his memorial today. As I meditated upon its verses, I couldn't help but notice the parallels with Don's life.

“The Lord is my shepherd; I shall not want.”

The Hebrew meaning is to “lack nothing; I shall not be in *want* of anything more.” Can you imagine a life like that? A life guided, provided for, and sustained by God's presence; in want of nothing more. That was Don's inspiration and guiding light while living out the many purposes of which he served.

Born in 1938, Don lived a childhood of *life during wartime*. With moves across the Deep South near military bases, Don learned early on the values of discipline, duty, integrity and service. With these values and a winsome personality, Don was recognized by his peers, elected Student Body President and named “Mr. Biloxi” at Biloxi High School. During which time he received numerous scholastic honors and earned an ROTC scholarship to Tulane University.

At Tulane Don played catcher for the Tulane baseball team, was Commander of the ROTC Pershing Rifles Drill Team, earned the highest national honor as a Distinguished Military Graduate and later inducted into the Tulane Hall of Fame.

As God opened doors Don walked through each one with purpose, humility, and gratitude. He lived a life never with a sense of entitlement, because he learned early on that the Shepherd supplied all he needed.

“He makes me lie down in green pastures; He leads me beside still waters; He restores my soul.”

The meaning here is a place of gladness and a soul at rest. Don's leadership qualities consisted of a calm center and steady presence. In stressful commands, dangerous deployments, he remained grounded. His sense of inner stillness manifested itself especially in his care for those he led in both military and civilian service to include:

The 82nd Airborne Division, the Special Forces, the 7th Cavalry in Vietnam. After the battlefield Don was a Professor of the Senior ROTC Unit at the University of Delaware; he served at the Pentagon and the Department of Defense, and here in Dallas with our MOWW Chapter as Director of Youth Leadership Conferences for 15 years. Led by the Shepherd who restored his soul, Don inspired and restored others as he himself was led by the still waters.

“He leads me in paths of righteousness for His name's sake.”

The paths of righteousness of the 23rd Psalm means a course of conduct, a path of honesty, justice and uprightness. My Jewish friends refer to that as being an *upstander*, a person who acts in support of an individual or in service to a cause.

In the United States Army, Don served on paths few others ever walk, a path my father also walked in Normandy – the path of combat in service to others. Maybe in heaven he will meet my father. Like my dad, Don earned the Silver Star and two Bronze Stars for Valor, and many other medals. I believe there is a special place in heaven for those willing to lay down their lives in service to others. The medals only tell part of the story. The rest is written in the lives Don Munson shaped, the soldiers he trained and led, the cadets he inspired, and the nation he served.

These were not easy paths, but paths of sacrifice, courage, and righteousness – not in perfection, but in humility and devotion to a cause greater than himself. In his reflections on Vietnam, he remembers getting shot at, getting wounded, getting a hug from an enemy POW, and never losing a man.

“Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil; for thou art with me; Thy rod and thy staff, they comfort me.”

It was during Don’s final months that these words took on deeper meaning. He didn’t fear the valley of death, he faced it head on and walked right through it. I had the privilege of sitting with him, talking quietly about life, about faith, about the things that truly matter.

What struck me most was how little he spoke about his own suffering. Don spoke of hospital stays, his many treatments, the pain; he spoke little of the horrors of battle.

What Don did speak of was his faith and his readiness as he walked through the valley of the shadow of death. He was not *giving up* the fight; he had *fought* the fight. There was no despair, no hesitation. As he spoke, I was reminded of St. Paul near the end of his life in his letter to Timothy:

“I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith.”

In those moments Don said something I will never forget. With quiet yet earnest conviction, he asserted:

“I am ready to meet my Maker.”

In that moment I understood something profound: Don was still a soldier. He faced this final valley the same way he faced every challenge of his life—with courage, faith, and with the assurance that the Shepherd walked with him.

“Thou preparest a table before me My cup overflows.”

In the Hebrew understanding of this, Don was an honored dinner guest of a generous and capable host. Don knew he was an honored guest. He knew the Shepherd who attended to his every need through our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. He had been filled with abundant life and the promise of an eternal home in heaven. It was from these eternal riches in his heart that his cup overflowed in all aspects of his life.

In the words and cadences of the Black Hats at Airborne School, it was the Holy Spirit who enabled him to ***stand tall and move with purpose***—not just in uniform, but in every step of his life.

“Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life.”

It was the goodness and mercy of a loving God that brought him confidence and deep joy, a cup that

overflowed in his military leadership, his community service; and most of all his love of his family and the relationships he formed on every assignment or project, volunteer or otherwise. Don Munson lived with purpose, always gave his best, and leaves behind the lives he touched.

“And finally, I shall dwell in the house of the Lord forever.”

This was Don’s comfort and is our comfort today. The same Shepherd who Don followed in life now welcomes him to his eternal home, some call Valhalla. Valhalla is a term used by elite combat units like the Airborne, the Special Forces and other veteran communities. The phrase **“*Til Valhalla*”** is an expression of respect and farewell to fallen companions.

The One we know as the Good Shepherd who guarded him through war, hardship, and loss now receives him to be reunited with his fallen service members, family and friends who went before him.

Today, we honor a soldier, a patriot, a husband, a father, a grandfather, a brother, and a friend. But more so, we honor a faithful servant of God—one who fought the good fight, finished the race, and kept the faith.

May God receive him with grace, and grant His servant, Don Black Munson, eternal rest and peace. And may God comfort his family and friends.

In the name of the Father, of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit.

Amen.