

# MARTINSVILLE BULLETIN

## Marine tribute sought

**Veterans want to honor Hatfield, support his family**

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By AMANDA BUCK - Bulletin Staff Writer

Laura Brooks never met Master Sgt. Jerome D. Hatfield, who was killed Saturday while supporting combat operations in Afghanistan.

Commander David Kipfinger didn't know the Marine, either. But Hatfield made the ultimate sacrifice for his country, and as military veterans, Brooks and Kipfinger want to make sure that doesn't go unnoticed.

To do that, they are organizing area veterans, active duty personnel and others to raise flags, hoist banners and generally show support during Hatfield's funeral at 11 a.m. Saturday at Norris Funeral Services. Burial will be in Patrick County.

"That's what I would want to see if I had to go bury my husband," said Brooks, a former Marine sergeant whose husband also is a Marine veteran. "I would want to see everybody in the whole city with a flag and their hand over their heart. Just because this isn't Camp Lejeune (where Hatfield was based), I don't want the family to think we don't know what's going on."

Hatfield, 36, of Axton, was assigned to 2nd Light Armored Reconnaissance Battalion, 2nd Marine Division, II Marine Expeditionary Force. An 18-year veteran of the Marine Corps, he served in Iraq in 2006 and 2008 and in the Adriatic Sea in 1992 and 2000, according to previous reports.

Brooks, 35, grew up in Pittsylvania County, where Hatfield lived for part of his youth. She served in the Marines from 1999 to 2007 and was deployed to Kuwait in 2003, during the first part of the Iraq war. Her husband, Alex Brooks, also a Marine, served in Iraq during that period.

Both were fortunate to come home alive, Brooks said. Hatfield wasn't. "We know what it's like — not to lose a spouse, but to be in the Marine Corps," she said. "... We know what it's like inside that brotherhood. This is how Marines take care of one another." Kipfinger, a 22-year Army veteran, echoed that sentiment. "I think it makes a big difference to the family, and to the community, to see that veterans, whether they are a member of a veterans group or not, that when a veteran falls in our community, we're there to support the family and to show the family that we care."



Marine Master Sgt. Jerome D.  
Hatfield

Kipfinger has been spreading the word among members of the Martinsville-Henry County Veterans Honor Guard, of which he is commander, as well as the American Legion, Veterans of Foreign Wars and others. "I recommend they all come just to be a part of the support," he said.

Brooks spent Wednesday calling area recruiters, veterans groups and law enforcement officers to encourage them to join the effort, in uniform if possible, when Hatfield is buried. "This is not official or (being organized) by the Marine Corps," she said. "It's just some local folks who want to show up and stand on a street corner, in front of the home — wherever the procession may drive. We want to show his family that we don't know you, but we love you, and we're here for you."

She said she hopes local businesses will join the effort by putting signs honoring Hatfield on billboards, and that others might post banners or American flags. She thinks those things will make a difference to Hatfield's three children, aged 4 to 19.

"I think they deserve it, for the community to show them that their daddy was a hero," Brooks said. "... It's not a celebration, but they deserve to see that people care. His wife deserves that too, because it's all on her now."

Brooks said she does not plan for people to approach the family; instead, she wants to show respect from a distance.

Anyone interested in joining Brooks and Kipfinger should contact Kipfinger at 806-6187.