

A Veterans Day thought

The Baltimore Sun's obituary paints a colorful picture of Christopher Coffland:

"His biography reads like that of several people combined: played professional football in Finland, coached football in Australia and lacrosse at Boys' Latin School of Maryland, worked as a university counselor at Loyola Marymount in Los Angeles, tended bar in Baltimore, studied anthropology at Washington State University, lived with Pygmies in Africa."

Obviously, an extraordinary individual!

With so much to offer, his last gift was to his Country. He was turning 42, cutoff date for enlistment, and he made the decision to sign up as an Army intelligence specialist. Then, on Friday, Nov. 13, he was robbed of life in Afghanistan by a roadside explosive device, only two weeks in country.

Baltimore is where he grew up, son of David and Antoinette and with four siblings, to whom I paid prayerful respects at the viewing before last Saturday's funeral Mass at the Cathedral of Mary Our Queen.

In the last seven weeks our parishes have celebrated funeral Masses for two fallen heroes - Christopher and Sgt. 1st Class Bradley Bohle (St. Bernadette, Severn), a tragic fraction of American lives offered to bring peace and stability to terrorist-infected, distant lands.

Soon after Veterans Day, I was privileged to lay a wreath at the Tomb of the Unknowns in Arlington National Cemetery, a most moving, memorable moment in my life, a life so intricately woven with the men and women of our Armed Forces, through many of my 44 years as a priest and bishop.

My respect and admiration for them remains boundless for they epitomize the Master's tribute: "Greater love than this no one has than to lay down his life for his friends."

And they, not only for friends, but for strangers, far away and faceless.

It brings to mind the Second Vatican Council's tribute to this vocation of such self-sacrifice:

"Those who are sworn to serve their country in the armed forces are servants of the security and freedom of nations. If they carry out their duty honorably, they truly contribute to the common good of the nation and the maintenance of peace."

Over more than 200 years as a Nation, how frequently have our young generations been called upon to pay that ultimate sacrifice for a free world. As our President ponders our next step in Afghanistan, all must be praying for a prudent decision that will yield long-range stability overseas and a soon, safe return home for the likes of Christopher Coffland.