

Dear family of Marko Knaps, his next of kin, friends and acquaintances.  
Respected fellow servicemen of Petty Officer 2nd Class Marko Knaps, member of the Navy Divers' Group, and members of the Defence Forces.

As the President of the Republic, I commemorate Petty Officer 2nd Class Marko Knaps, who was killed in service. As a citizen of the Republic of Estonia, I feel the pain of mourning as a brave young man, a son and a brother as well as a valued comrade for his fellow servicemen has departed us. The death here at home of a defence force member in service is something that will touch us all, painfully. Estonia is a small country and every soldier is important for us, whether he is serving here, on the shores of the Gulf of Finland, or far away, in Afghanistan.

Dear Merilin, partner of Marko Knaps, his mother Anne-Ly and father Valdo and all his next of kin: the Republic of Estonia shares your pain. Estonia mourns and commemorates a soldier – a soldier in the most noble meaning of the world.

Marko Knaps was consistent in his thoughts and acts. His teachers remember that he already knew as a schoolboy what he wanted to become in the future. This was shared by Marko's fellow servicemen from the time of his compulsory military service. Becoming a diver and attaining one of the most dangerous professions of the defence force members serving in Estonia – this was his choice. This decision to serve his country was a mature and adult one from a young man – a respectable decision.

Petty Officer 2nd Class Marko Knaps was killed in an operation that could also be called a battle task as it served the purpose of making the Baltic Sea safer for all of us. No one knows exactly how many unexploded missiles and naval mines are at the bottom of the Gulf of Finland, which is a busy shipping route. It is estimated that more than 150,000 mines were launched into the Baltic Sea during the world wars and 80,000 of them were targeted for the Gulf of Finland. Approximately 700 mines have been cleared from Estonian waters over the period of twenty years in the course of mine clearance operations.

Marko Knaps did more good in his short service than any of us are given the chance to achieve. He contributed to making the Baltic Sea – our sea – a safer place and making our lives more secure in general.

We do not yet know what caused this tragic accident. But I do hope and wish that we find an answer to this question soon.

One of Marko Knaps's fellow servicemen wrote the following lines into his book of condolences: "We stand at attention to pay homage to Petty Officer 2nd Class Knaps. Rest in peace, fighter". I can only repeat these words.

And here, at the coffin covered with colours of the Estonian flag, let us think of all the brave men who have fallen for Estonia and commemorate them. Each and every one of them has stood for a more secure today and tomorrow for all of us.

Thank you, Petty Officer 2nd Class Marko Knaps. Thank you for serving the Republic of Estonia.